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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the 10 issues of the newsletter Rural Policy Matters published in 1999. The newsletter seeks to promote understanding of the complex issues affecting rural schools and communities, to inform the public debate over rural education policy, and to report what rural people are doing to shape education policy in their state. Topics in 1999 included: grassroots action to reform public policies in various states, highlights from an electronic symposium on standards, telecommunications discounts for rural areas, the Vermont Department of Education's support for small schools, eligibility of poor rural schools for interest-free Qualified Zone Academy Bonds, the effects of long bus rides on children, the relationships of school violence to school size and rural-urban location, the benefits of small school size in Montana, a Colorado election on school district deconsolidation, accountability systems in states with decentralized or centralized decision-making authority, the cost of busing, school modernization bills before Congress, housing development and resegregation, the number of students per school board as a measure of local control, findings that Nebraska small schools compare well to large schools on costs per high school graduate, involving students in school decision making, rural teacher shortages, schools as the center of community, and place-based education. (SV)

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RC 022218

Rural Policy Matters

RPM 1.1 March 1999 www.ruralchallengepolicy.org

Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of **Rural Policy Matters**, the newsletter of the Annenberg Rural Challenge's program on public policy. We want to help you make a difference for the good in rural schools and communities.

All of us have concerns that have made us advocates for rural education. Some of us are inside the schools, some are in state government, some are parents, students, or dedicated community members. What we all have in common is a desire to see rural schools and communities thrive and an interest in working for public policies that help. You'll read about those efforts here.

The Policy Program works mostly through dialogue, sometimes in debate, and occasionally we love a real knockdown drag-out fight. We recognize that all is not harmony in our rural communities; there is division, inequity, prejudice, ignorance, poverty, and sometimes a good dose of stubbornness. There are advocates for change, and those who like things as they are. Some like things as they used to be, some as they could be.

What works well in one part of the country may not be a good idea somewhere else. That's why from the start our schoolwork has been your schoolwork. Your local involvement is essential to making things work in your communities. Our job is to help you sort out what public policy can do to help, not hinder. Mostly we will aim at state policies, because that is the level in American education politics where more and more of the action is.

We look forward to working with you.

Grassroots Action

Across rural America, people who want the best from public education for their children and their communities are launching campaigns to reform public policies.

In **Nebraska**, a broad coalition of educators, farm and rural development groups, and school activists (including the School at the Center, a Rural Challenge partner) defeated a proposed constitutional amendment that would have frozen government spending at levels so low that dozens of rural schools would have been forced to close.

In **Wisconsin**, the Wisconsin Rural Challenge has been organized to form and train "public engagement teams" to promote policies that value and support rural schools and community life. They have drafted a bill to provide funding for schools who innovate with place-based education.

In **West Virginia**, rural activists from across the state are organizing a "school community leadership project" to strengthen grassroots participation in state education policy, and an "education forum" to help rural people improve small schools.

In **Alabama** (and in other states in the South), African-American parents and community members are launching a campaign to end the de facto policy of tracking (grouping students according to ability) which has the effect of "dumbing down" the curriculum for African-Americans and segregating classes within the walls of the school.

In **Pennsylvania**, rural schools and their advocates have led the way in filing lawsuits challenging the school funding formula as inequitable; in **Ohio** and **New Hampshire**, rural schools led successful court battles to overturn finance systems. The action there has shifted to the respective state legislatures.

These are but a few examples of the energy coming from rural America as mounting political pressure to standardize and centralize education decision making threatens to close rural schools and break the historic ties between schools and communities. In most cases these are spontaneous, grassroots efforts, many involving partners of the Annenberg Rural Challenge.

The Rural Challenge Policy Program will try to keep you informed about these and many other efforts. You can help us do that by telling us what rural people are doing to shape education policy in your state. Give us the central facts and let us know whom to contact for more details. You post us, we'll post others.

Let Us Hear From You

Do you have tales to tell about policy work in your schools and communities? Any suggestions, comments, or tips for other concerned rural citizens? If you have experience and knowledge to share or question to ask about rural education policy, about organizing in your community, about action on issues, legislation, or litigation, we're all ears. Please call write, e-mail, fax, visit our web site, or send up flares.

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Standards and Community Control:

Notes from the Rural Challenge Electronic-Symposium

Online symposium: November, 1998 through February, 1999
Video/online session: January 13, 1999
Video conference participants: 200 plus
Online participants: 300 plus
Video sites: Burlington VT, Portland OR, Jackson MS, Mendicino CA, Lincoln NE, Birmingham AL, and Englewood CO.

Overcoming a few minor and very amusing technical glitches, the three-hour "live" portion of this first Rural Challenge online symposium held January 13, 1999 sparked debate around the standards issue that continues online and across the country today. Panelists, video site attendees, and a broader network of online participants in schools, offices, and homes across the country all joined in the discussion.

Though opinions varied on the role of federal, state, and local input in standards, no one dismissed the value of some form of standards as a useful tool. Standardized testing on the other hand, and the type of high stakes assessment and accountability strategies now being championed by the Clinton administration and most state education agencies, were criticized by many participants for creating unproductive pressures to "teach to the test" rather than providing meaningful learning.

While offering great commentary on the Rural Challenge's Draft Policy Statement on Standards, which you can read and comment on at our web site, the e-symposium accomplished its purpose of raising more questions than it answered. We hope you will join us and continue this discussion in your communities.

In Your Words, Highlights from the Standards Symposium

Our children are not 'products,' their work is not an 'outcome,' their purpose is not to be 'tools' in a larger global competition. How they grow up is a matter as much of habits of the heart as habits of the mind—neither of which are much in evidence in the schools of today or the ones the well-intentioned fixers have in mind for tomorrow."

— Deborah Meier, Keynote address

. . . no matter how we couch standards (or who makes them), the MEASUREMENT of the standards are—and I fear—will continue to be used by the media, and by the general public(s) to compare DISTRICT to DISTRICT or STATE to STATE rather than appropriately comparing achievement and progress of individual students to meeting standards set in each district. The whole accountability initiative (not saying that accountability is not needed) seems to have gotten out of hand and appears to be counter-productive to keeping good teachers and administrators on primary tasks of teaching!

— Online participant Mary Travillian, Iowa

If students are lobbying for changes in local ordinances, for establishing a land trust, or for introducing county or state legislation governing migrant labor, school buildings or budgeting, or other areas of concern to them, the external standards that can foster learning are those that characterize the work of ethical and effective lobbyists, lawyers, advocates, and organizers.

— Online participant Anne Wheelock, Vermont

Standards: Continuing the Conversation

The Standards E-symposium web site will remain active through the end of February. Beginning in March, all contributions will be archived at www.ruraledu.org.

High standards are good. They are and have been coveted by most educators. The quest for them in the present atmosphere is generating powerful policies and practices that often seem to be too simple, too centralized and generally unquestioned. To succeed the movement for higher standards must engage and be informed by local schools and communities; it must recognize the competence and concern of the majority of teachers; it must do justice, not harm, to children of poverty.

— Jack Shelton, Panelist, Alabama

Will standards become the tool that focuses education on passing the test, or will it become the catalyst that leads to dialogue between all parties involved—students, educators, and parents/community members?

— Online participant Amina Shahid-El, North Carolina

Research

Long Bus Rides: What Do We Really Know?

We all know what it's like to be behind a slow school bus, but what's it like for the young people riding on them? Rural school busing is not a new phenomenon, yet we still have virtually no information on what the effects of long bus rides are on students and their families.

We know more about the wear and tear on the buses than about the wear and tear on the people! That's going to change.

On December 15, 1998, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, the Journal of Education Finance and the Rural Challenge Policy Program convened a group of geographers, rural sociologists, school officials, community organizers, and education researchers to sketch out a busing research agenda. Specific research topics include investigations of the history of rural school busing, its politics, the social and psychological effects of busing, and the impact busing has on students' education.

Join Us On the Web

If you have easy access to the world wide web, we encourage you to visit our web site at www.ruralchallengepolicy.org

From there you can reach the Standards E-symposium, the Policy Program or the main web area for Rural Challenge project sites. You'll find information on our various initiatives, publications, links, and ways to help.

E-Rate Telecommunications Discount Faces New Foes

For two years, the Education and Library Coalition (EdLiNC) has been instrumental in the fight to keep well known telephone companies such as Southwestern Bell, GTE, Bell Atlantic, Cincinnati Bell, and BellSouth from dismantling a federal program to provide rate discounts for schools and libraries to gain access to telecommunications services. The Rural Challenge along with many school and library organizations, is a member of EdLiNC and sees great benefits for rural areas through the so-called, "E-Rate" discounts. Now, new threats to the program have emerged that should greatly concern rural residents.

The E-Rate Termination Act, as it is termed by its sponsors, attempts to once again short-circuit the universal service program for schools and libraries, which brings a 20–90% discount for all telecommunications service and Internet access, and discounts for internal connections available to the nation's poorer districts.

Novice House member Tom Tancredo, R-Colo., and returning members Pete Sessions, R-Texas, and Ed Royce, R-Calif., solicited their colleagues' support on January 26 for legislation currently being drafted by Tancredo.

It would seem that the three Republican congressmen insist on dubbing the E-Rate as a "backdoor tax" and conclude that such funding is not necessary because "federal funding already exists to improve technology in schools." E-School News reported Scott Slusher, press secretary for Rep. Tancredo, as saying, "Our intention is to end the program," citing the congressman's opposition to tax in any form. Although not yet introduced, the bill is certain to renew debate in Congress over whether the E-Rate should continue to exist and/or what funds should more logically be used for that purpose.

What fails to be taken into account by Tancredo and others is that alternate sources of technology-related federal funding do not include the cost of telecommunications service. Such grant programs may cover some hardware, software, teacher professional development training and other costs, but do not deal with the ongoing operational costs or the one-time costs associated with wiring for Internet access.

The contention that the E-Rate constitutes an unlegislated "tax" is not new, but it is simply an inconsistent argument. If the E-Rate is a "tax," then so too are all contributions to the universal service high-cost and low-income funds, which have been in effect for decades. These have never been questioned as illegal "taxes." With the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the consequent effort to make all "implicit" subsidies "explicit" arose the opportunity for large telecommunications providers to allow consumers to misconstrue the new "surcharge" appearing on their bill. Thus, the furor over the E-Rate!

The future of the Tancredo bill is far from certain, but the efforts to move the source of funding for the E-Rate to the current telephone excise tax (passed to support the Spanish American War) may make a larger splash. Legislation introduced by Representative Billy Tauzin (R-Louisiana) and Senator Conrad Burns (R-Montana) would not only contribute significantly less money to the effort, it would also be a limited 5-year program. Eventually, their plan would totally dismantle the Schools and Libraries Division, the current program administrator, eliminating the benefit of their considerable expertise in the Internet-based application and assistance process which they have developed in the 18 months since the program began.

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Yes, Virginia, There Is Another Way

Virginia, recently noted for having the most efficient state government in the country, has not fared so well with the first test of its Standards of Learning program. As reported in January by Education Week, only 39 schools across the state achieved the level of test scores that will be needed for their schools to maintain accreditation in 2007, the year of reckoning for Virginia schools. Unfortunately, this means the remaining 1,773 schools in the state would have lost their accreditation based on this year's scores matics, English, histo nce tests.

Teachers, parents, students, and administrators are all concerned about raising test scores in their schools to acceptable levels, and fast. No one knows yet what losing accreditation might mean for schools not able to raise their scores to by 2007. Virginia's standards approach, praised and copied by others across the country, is now under scrutiny for its heavy reliance on memorization of facts. Hopefully their emphasis on testing as a means of gauging school accountability will also receive serious review.

E-Rate Faces New Foes

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At this time, it is uncertain where either of these latest assaults on the E-Rate will end up. What is certain is that the E-Rate Program has now entered its second application year, the application window for which has recently been extended to April 6, 1999. It will be very difficult indeed to short-circuit funding to the 30,000+ schools who are anticipating funding . . . but time will tell.

For more information on the ups and downs of the E-Rate battles, visit our web site for links to EdLiNC and other technology oriented information sources.

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. If you'd prefer to receive it online, please let us know. E-mail us at rchallenge@quest-net.com or send us a note with your e-mail address included through our web site's comments form, at www.ruralchallengepolicy.org. You may also correct your address on the label below and fax this page to us at 802.728.2011.

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RPM 1.1 **March 1999**

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RPM 1.2

Rural Policy Matters

April 1999 A Newsletter of Rural School & Community Action www.ruraledu.org

Vermont Takes Positive Stand on Small Schools

Small schools in Vermont cost more to operate than larger schools but they are worth the investment because of the value they add to student learning and community cohesion," the Vermont Department of Education concludes in a report mandated by the legislature in a controversial school finance law.

The study found that students in small schools do as well or better than those in larger schools despite lower income and education levels in the community, lower teacher salaries, and less state aid, on average. The small schools had about the same number of "new generation" computers per pupil, but more internet access and smaller classes. The per pupil cost of operating these schools, on average, ran about 18% higher than the state average. But these costs were mitigated by higher levels of community volunteerism in food service, art, music, and library services. The school was also a vital community building in many places—a fourth of the small school communities had no grocery store, restaurant, convenience store, or post office.

Among the report's recommendations:

- The state should continue to provide additional funding for small schools—the new law allocated special funding for schools with under 100 students—and increase the threshold for this assistance from schools with under 100 students to schools with under 120 students.
- If the evidence continues to be strong that disadvantaged children do better in small schools, the state should consider providing additional aid for the first 100 students in every school, encouraging smallness itself rather than just helping a special category of small schools.
- Protect small schools from a sudden drop in the basic per-pupil block grant caused by a small change in enrollment by limiting the reduction to 10% of the previous year's funding.

Vermont is a veritable small school haven. With barely 106,000 students and 312 schools spread among 255 towns, Vermont is filled with small schools in small places. Fifty schools meet the threshold of fewer than 100 students required for special aid under Act 60.

Act 60 was adopted in 1997 after a Supreme Court decision finding the entire school finance system unconstitutional because it depended too much on local property taxes resulting in wide disparities in local spending on schools. Act 60 has one of the most aggressive "Robin Hood" provisions in the nation. Under the act, a statewide property tax—the same rate on all property in the state—collects enough funds to pay every school a flat amount per pupil. The pupil count for each school is adjusted however so that low-income children each count

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Big School, Small School: A look at the achievement gap in four states

Many states, by encouraging larger schools in hope of lowering per pupil spending, may be unwittingly contributing to the widening gap between the academic achievement of the rich and the poor. That is one of the implications of the preliminary findings of a study on how school size interacts with poverty to affect student achievement in four states—Georgia, Montana, Ohio, and Texas.

"Consistently, I'm finding that when I divide a state's schools into two groups, smaller half and larger half, the smaller half shows a much weaker relationship between poverty and achievement than the larger half," says independent researcher Craig Howley, who formerly directed the U.S. Department of Education's ERIC Clearinghouse for Rural and Small Schools at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory. Howley, and Marshall University education researcher Robert Bickel, are principal investigators for the research, which is supported by a grant from the Rural Challenge Policy Program.

The study replicates and expands previous work by Howley and others in West Virginia, Alaska, and California. The additional four states—in four separate regions of the nation—are testing whether the earlier findings prevail nationally.

Preliminary results seem to indicate that, overall, achievement does not differ much between large

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School Boards and Community Participation: Is it Happening?

Public schools, local communities and education policies overlap (and occasionally collide) within the work and world of school boards. Theoretically, as democratically elected representatives of home communities, school boards are endowed with the responsibility to create the policies that direct their local schools. They are the legal and cultural entity that provides the close interface between community and school. School boards can be (or should be) an institution for very direct and influential community participation in local education.

So to what extent is this happening? Are there obstacles that prevent school boards from playing this critical role? Since one aspect of the mission of the Policy Program is "to help rural communities act on education policy issues affecting them," we are directing our attention to the potential of public school boards to strengthen rural schools in the context of their local communities.

School board powers and responsibilities vary significantly from state to state. Depending on specific state statutes and practices, school boards have a wide range of powers. Some boards can form and approve budgets, make personnel decisions, determine curriculum, close schools, negotiate union contracts. Others have more limited responsibilities. In order to tap the potential of school boards to act as authentic community agents, it is necessary to first understand how existing school board governance varies throughout the United States.

To gather information we sent out a three-page survey to the executive directors of each state's school board association. This questionnaire investigates areas such as board member demographics, methods of selection, powers, responsibilities, training opportunities and needs, collaborative efforts, presence of special interest groups, and their perceptions of the influence boards have in statewide issues.

You can view the results of the survey online at **www.ruraledu.org** or call the Policy office for a copy. Check often as these results will be updated periodically. Meanwhile, if you have thoughts and/or experiences to share regarding school boards, please write, e-mail, or fax the Rural Challenge Policy Program. We welcome and invite your input.

Please Note Our New Web Address

Effective immediately, the new web address for the Rural Challenge Policy Program is:

www.ruraledu.org

Please make note of this change in your web browser's bookmark file.

Vermont Takes Positive Stand on Small Schools

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as 1.25 children. If a town wants to spend more in its school than the state provides, it can collect its own local property tax to pay for it. However, the tax base for all towns that choose to do so is shared equally among them, so that every town that chooses to spend at the same level is taxed at the same level.

It's this provision that angers a group of towns with high property values per pupil—so-called "gold" towns. Under the old system, they could afford to spend a lot per pupil on schools with a few kids in them without taxing at a very high rate. A lot of these towns are part of the state's mountainous ski and recreation economy, where condominiums, second homes, and resorts bolster the tax base of towns without many students.

Of course, a lot of the people in gold towns don't have much gold—they wait tables or scratch out a living in agriculture or forestry. Act 60 tries to protect them, and other Vermont property owners who don't make much income from their property, by limiting the amount of property tax any person has to pay on residential property to 2 percent of their income.

To combat Act 60, many gold towns are turning to private funding, which does not have to be shared the way tax revenues have to be shared. If they can support higher spending through private donations, they can avoid sharing with poorer towns. The battle over this issue has become particularly heated in a state known for its civil political climate.

Many of the small schools are in gold towns, but a lot of them are not. They are both ends of the spectrum of rich and poor. As the battle over school funding rages, the possibility of finding something good to support that reaches across the rich-town-poor-town divide looks more attractive.

What we're thinking

Empowerment of rural people in the long run is more important than merely changing policy in the short run. So, we will often strive to engage people at the grassroots level, even when it is not the most efficient way to change policies.

—a premise of the Policy Program

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Research Papers Now Available Online

The Rural Challenge has an active research component working on many rural school and community issues with the intention of getting the best information available into the hands of community decision makers like you. Below are quotes from two recent papers. Full text of these documents is available free online at **www.ruraledu.org** or for a modest fee by calling the Policy Program office.

Pressure to consolidate schools motivates virtually all the research on how schools impact local communities. That is because merging small, rural schools—with the expectation of improving educational opportunities while achieving greater efficiency—typically leaves some communities with expanded facilities and others with no facilities or sometimes only an elementary school. The questions naturally arise, "What happens to towns where consolidation results in closing a local school? Do they lose economic vitality? Community cohesiveness? Or perhaps, political involvement?"

—from *What Difference do Local Schools Make? A Literature Review and Bibliography* by Priscilla Salant and Anita Waller

"Progress" for rural America has however always been a double-edged sword. For every technological advance which has made rural life easier, there has typically been a loss or restructuring of social and political life. The restructuring of rural public schools and schooling in fact provides an excellent example of just how the ideology of modernity has eroded local democracy and local institutional control. Today, the smaller the community, the more likely it no longer has its own public school; the less likely educational decisions are debated and understood by local parents; and the less likely face-to-face democracy concerning educational policy is recreated.

Gone are local trustees, one and two room schools, spelling bees, debating societies and picnics on the grounds. Rather, there are yellow buses, normed achievement tests, school cafeterias and educational specialists who typically drive in from a neighboring city to instruct rural children in all that is modern and instrumental to life somewhere else.

—from *Parent Participation, School Accountability And Rural Education: The Impact Of KERA* [Kentucky Education Reform Act] *On Kentucky School Facilities Policy* by Alan J. DeYoung

Big School, Small School

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and small schools in these states. However, school size makes a difference when you look at communities of different levels of affluence and poverty.

In general, while big schools slightly benefit the achievement of students from wealthier communities, they actually harm the achievement of students from poorer communities. And the negative affects of big schools in poor communities are much greater than their positive effect in affluent communities. This is a somewhat surprising finding, since overall, school size doesn't show much of a relationship with student achievement. Only when you look, as in Howley's research, at the interaction between school size and poverty does the relationship of size to achievement become clear.

In practical terms, it seems that school size can make several years' difference in learning over a school career. The achievement gap between kids from affluent and kids from poor communities can be widened (as happens in some states) or narrowed (as happens in other states). Montana seems to be an example of a state where small schools help close the gap between affluent and poor areas.

And the results are the same whether you measure school size or district size, says Howley.

"Massification is a century-long trend to big schools and districts," says Howley, "and it hasn't served students, communities, or democracy well."

One crucial issue: Is the better performance of small schools in poor communities because the school is small or only because small schools typically have fewer kids in each classroom? Could we get the same result from big schools with smaller classrooms? Howley says that statistically controlling for the small classroom variable does not much change the results of the analysis. The influence of school and district size is different from—and not weakened by—the effect of class size.

This makes sense because factors like school climate and culture, community, and extracurricular participation rates are features of schools that powerfully, but indirectly, influence student performance. Small schools probably help attach kids who, if they attended large schools, would be regarded at best as unimportant to the success of the school, and at worst as a hindrance to increasing school test scores, an increasingly important factor in school funding in many states.

It might be that all kids are needed and valued in small schools, because small schools have to do all the things large schools do, but with fewer people. Everyone has to pitch in, and students are actively recruited for that purpose, not just by educators, but by friends, neighbors, and relatives.

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No Long Distance for Local Internet Calls: FCC Clarifies Telephone Charges

There have been rumors and concerns floating around the Internet and elsewhere about an order from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on February 25, 1999 regarding how telephone companies can charge for the call your modem makes to your local Internet service provider (ISP). Because the call is local but the result is global access to the Internet, this has been a murky area. Phone companies asked the FCC for clarification.

The rumors of long distance charges on local Internet access should be a warning but not a worry.

The bottom line is that Internet usage will never go back to straight long-distance rates. As the FCC said in their news release, "the decision preserves the rule that exempts the Internet and other information services from interstate access charges. This means that those consumers who continue to access the Internet by dialing a seven-digit number will not incur long distance charges when they do so."

The full text of the FCC ruling can be found at **http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Orders/1999/fcc99038.txt**

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. If you'd prefer to receive it online, please let us know. E-mail us at rchallenge@quest-net.com or send us a note with your e-mail address included through our web site's comments form, at www.ruraledu.org. You may also correct your address on the label below and fax this page to us at 802.728.2011.

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Rural Policy Matters

May 1999 A Newsletter of Rural School & Community Action www.ruraledu.org

QZAB — What's In It for Rural Schools?

Hint: It's not a radio station

Imagine that last fall a group of business owners in a small town met with the elementary school principal to talk about their school and community.

They knew the town was a good place to raise their children, but they worried that too many students who went to college never came back, while others turned their backs on college and never left town. They wondered how young people were going to find jobs that allowed them to stay in the community.

The principal told the group about a former student, now a ninth grader, who had stopped by to see him. "You know Mr. Perkins," the boy had said, "school here was great but when I got to high school the science teacher told us to take out our Bunsen burners. I didn't know what he was talking about."

"We don't have any science room in the elementary school," the principal told the group. "There is no equipment, not even a microscope. We need sinks and a gas jet—but it would cost a lot to add a science room and equip it for our students. There's not much we can do—we just don't have the money, but our kids really suffer when they go onto the high school."

He would have been right that they didn't have the money, but not that they couldn't do something about building a science room. Say the school is located in a poor rural district, one in which more than 35% of the students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. That would mean it is eligible for interest free bonds known as Qualified Zone Academy Bonds or QZABs. These bonds are available through a joint effort of the U.S. Departments of Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, Education and Agriculture working with outside agencies such as the National Alliance of Business. If the principal had known about QZABs he might have suggested to the group that they work together to apply for federal tax credits to pay the interest on a loan to combine and renovate two existing storerooms into a science lab.

How does the program work? A financial institution, such as a bank, or insurance company agrees to make the loan for the bond with local businesses donating the equivalent of at least 10% of the value in time and or materials. Instead of receiving interest payments the lender receives a tax credit each year during the life of the bond (based on a formula). The district agrees to pay off the bond over a maximum of 14 years but it does not pay interest on the loan. For example, the pharmacy might have given used equipment, the nursing home might have sent its doctor and nurse to teach classes, the hardware store might have given its old computers and donated some materials for the new science room.

Any public school serving students in K-12 that operates a special academic program in cooperation with businesses designed to enhance the academic curriculum and increase graduation and employment rates is eligible if it fits into one of two categories. The school must either be in an Enterprise Community or it must be a school in which it can "reasonably expected that at least 35 percent of the students at the school will be eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches."

Throughout the nation, communities demonstrating need have received designation as either an Empow-

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Brought to our attention

THE GRITS FACTOR

One of the United States' most competitive universities reportedly favors applicants from small towns. *Newsweek* reports that the University of Chicago refers to its preference as the "grits factor." "Small town kids tend to be well developed as individuals. Like big-city kids, they've had a wider range of experiences than sheltered suburbanites. By that measure, the truly disadvantaged student is the child of a soccer mom, shuttling from one scheduled activity to another." (Newsweek, 4/5/99, p57)

Reprinted from *Aspen Institute Rural Update*, http://www.aspeninst.org/rural; ruralupdate@lists.aspeninst.org

Framing the issues

Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides

Busing rural school children, which began early this century as a way to ease the path to school consoli-dation, has turned into a massive enterprise. Today, 23 million children—60% of students—ride in 400,000 school buses that log over 21 million miles every day and 3.8 billion miles a year at an annual cost of over $10 billion. The Rural Challenge estimates that about three-fourths of the busing is endured by the one-fourth of the children who attend rural schools.

There isn't much doubt that busing has been a companion of consolidation. Thirty-one states passed laws passed laws allowing public money to be used to transport students almost immediately after passing laws to consolidate schools. In another 14 states consolidation and pupil transportation laws passed simultaneously. Longer bus rides seem poor consolation for the loss of a community school.

Of course, since the 1960s, busing has also been closely related to racial integration, both in cities and in rural areas. Those opposed to integration often argued that busing ought not to be used to accomplish integration because it was a financial burden, bad for children, against tradition, and contradictory to the values of a community school. Because the motive behind these arguments was not to save money or prevent child abuse or support community schools, but to preserve segregation, they were properly dismissed. Today, rural children of all races are bused.

And we don't know much about the effect of this busing on any of them. Not much scholarly research on the topic has ever been done, and it stopped altogether in the early 1970s, partly because of the racist taint to the issue. The last study, a 1972 analysis of the effects of bus rides on achievement of 440 Oklahoma students, found that the longer the bus ride the lower the composite achievement score (Lu and Tweeten). Since then, a virtual shroud has covered the topic. Studies in Canada and Australia have provided some insight, but not a lot of depth. Some states keep statistics on costs and efficiency of busing, largely because the calculations are needed for distribution of school aid. So we know, or can find out, what it costs to buy, drive, maintain and repair buses.

In short, we know more about the effect of busing on the buses than on the kids.

As you may have read here before, the Rural Challenge wants to change that. With the Appalachian Education Laboratory (and the financial support of the Ford Foundation), we convened a panel of education research scholars to outline a vigorous research agenda (watch for notice of publi-cation). In the coming months, we hope to commission several research projects within this agenda.

It is difficult to believe that such a pervasive and expensive part of the education system has escaped scrutiny for so long. For more information, including more on busing history and prior research, and lots of interesting anecdotal information about current practices and its effect on children, see *Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides*, a Rural Challenge white paper by Policy Program consultant Belle Zars. Check for the paper on the Policy Program's website,www.ruraledu.org, under Publications, or call our office for a copy.❖

Lu,Y and Tweeten, L. (1973). Impact of Busing on Student Achievement. *Growth and Change*, 4, 44-46.

QZAB

from page 1

erment Zone (EZ) in urban areas, or an Enterprise Community (EC) which can be either rural or urban. These communities have gone through a demanding application process and been approved for priority funding from agencies including the Department of Agriculture, and Housing and Urban Development. More communities will be eligible under the second criterion, that 35% of the students can reasonably be expected to be eligible for free or reduced lunch.

There is a lot more to learn about this program. If you are in an Enterprise Community, contact your rural Development Coordinator. Otherwise call the office of Dr. William L. Smith, Director, U.S. Department of Education, Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community Task Force, by email at William_Smith@ed.gov or by phone at 202.401.0843.

In 1999 the federal government will make $400 million available for QZABs. This year the Congress will also consider legislation increasing the funding and adding a powerful new program: School Modernization Bonds. Together these programs would help rural schools fund vital renovation and new construction of school facilities. If you have had experience with the program please let us know how it worked in your district.❖

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My Place: A Window on the World

Tying local research to the realities of globalization

Chances are very good that the popular name brand soccer ball used in your local schools was hand stitched by children working long days for pennies per hour as indentured laborers for one of 70 contract manufacturers in Sialkot, a provincial city in Pakistan. But chances of that being true in the future are a little less today, thanks to a lot of publicity generated by children's and human rights organizations concerned about the abuse of children. Fearful of consumer resistance, Sialkot manufacturers and many of the global corporations they produce soccer balls for have entered into plausibly enforceable agreements not to use child labor.

That's good news. Unfortunately, some of those manufacturers have refused to agree, and others have simply moved their operations to China, or Morocco (where they still use Pakistani immigrants), or somewhere else in the global economy. And we do not really know if the children in Pakistan, freed of the demands for their labor, will be able to attend school, to play ball, or to have a life free from fear and want.

Still, if we see "Made in Pakistan" on a soccer ball, we can hold out some hope that it represents a small step forward, a chance for local dignity in a global economy.

Things can be complicated, and accordingly, so can the public policies that help shape things. But learning a great deal about the things closest to home can be one of the best ways to learn about the complex world beyond home.

The Rural Challenge supports development of rural community schools that link academic excellence with a sense of place and respect for community. We work to (1) make rural schools better by building on the strengths of their communities; (2) teach rural children to love learning by rooting it in the place they come from; and (3) make rural communities better by engaging schools in their problems.

The Rural Challenge Policy Program wants to engage students in scholarly work that uses everyday surroundings in their school and their community as the context for understanding larger patterns in the world economy and society, and for analyzing the public policy issues raised by those patterns. We call this project "My Place: A Window on the World." Watch for more developments in this newsletter. ❖

Sorting through the federal changes

New Primer Available on Title I and "Ed-flex"

This year, Congress has begun debate on renewing ("reauthorizing" is the official word) the centerpiece of federal legislation affecting local schools the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The key section of the act, popularly referred to as "Title I," provides nearly $8 billion per year to improve education for 11 million children who attend 45,000 schools with high concentrations of poverty. The debate about renewing Title I is to begin in the House in the next few weeks. Some observers predict that the House will reauthorize Title I and all other parts of ESEA this year, but that it is unlikely the Senate will finish the process this year. There will be times when you may want to express your opinions to your representatives in Congress. The Rural Challenge has written a background briefing to help you prepare for that possibility.

You can get the primer free online through our Policy Program publications page at www.ruraledu.org, or request a printed version by calling our office at 802.782.5899.

In the coming months, we will be informing you about the reauthorization of Title I—what gets in the law and what doesn't; whether Ed-Flex survives and in what form; and what the steps in obtaining a waiver will be, in case you might need one. Whether federal dollars are going to continue to be used to promote equal educational oppor-tunity for the most needy children or become a blank check for state officials to play with is up to all of us. ❖

What we're thinking

Lasting and effective school reform is rooted in the community, where the potential for political power lies and where continuity can be achieved, more than in the school, which is an institution that responds to many forces and is particularly vulnerable to the effect of small changes in personnel. The participation and commitment of the community in school reform is therefore primary. Our policy work must not be directed "at" the community but built from within it. So, it is crucial that all or nearly all of the policy work engage people outside the school on their own terms, and not merely as invitees to the school.

—a premise of the Policy Program

Publication profiles community and school action

Personal Involvement In Public Life

We are proud to be distributing a new Rural Challenge publication we think you'll find inspiring, *Standing Up for Community and School: Rural People Tell Their Stories*, written by our associate Bradwell Scott. The booklet provides powerful stories about rural people's struggles and successes in making their schools work for them and their communities. All of our regular *Rural Policy Matters* subscribers should receive a complimentary copy. If you'd like to see about getting more copies for distribution, please call Chris Mester at the Policy Program office, 802.728.5899.

"What's been missing, therefore, is the concept of public life. Not public life as fame and notoriety, like the flashy images of Hollywood stars, sports figures, and politicians. Not public life as mere voting. But public life as the roles we take at work, at school, and in our communities.

"What's missing has been the core insight that democracy—whether it works or not—depends on how each of us lives our public life, our lives outside our families. Also missing has been any understanding that without meaningful public lives we can't protect and further the well-being of those we care about most in our private lives."

—Lappe and DuBois, *The Quickening of America*

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. If you'd prefer to receive it online, please let us know. E-mail us at rchallenge@quest-net.com or send us a note with your e-mail address included through our web site's comments form, at www.ruraledu.org. You may also correct your address on the label below and fax this page to us at 802.728.2011.

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Rural Policy Matters

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Another Take on School Violence

School size and location, are they factors?

The recent events at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado have once again raised the question: *How could this happen?*

There are no easy answers to the complex question of violence in schools. Yet in the search for explanations, we can look at what we do know about the characteristics of schools and communities where violence occurs. While we must recognize that every school situation is different and that there are always many variables involved in creating a safe school climate, including the students themselves, time and again a factor that is under the control of education policy decisions shows up: school size.

Of the seven recent deadly school shootings in the US, five took place in schools with enrollments close to or over 1,000. They took place in large towns and rural towns, suburbs and cities. Does this mean that bigger schools are more prone to violence no matter where they're located? According to the research that's been done, smaller and less crowded schools would appear to be generally safer places.

In 1975, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary commissioned a report to examine violence and disorder in schools. The report, called the Bayh report, described US schools as being hotbeds of violence and warned that schools were dangerous places. The Bayh report has since been reexamined by several researchers, all of whom concluded that the report was flawed. The problem, and the reason the report came up with such startling statistics, was that the author's sample was skewed toward large schools. So while the Bayh report mistakenly concluded that all US schools were settings for violence, it made an important connection between school size and violence. Since then, numerous studies have reached the same conclusion.

- A 1977 study by the New Jersey School Boards Association found that size was the most important predictor of violence at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In particular, schools that held more than their capacity, exceeded a size limit, and/or had classes of more than 27 students were at risk.
- Gottfredson and Dalger (1979) re-analyzed data used in the National Institute of Education's *Safe School* reports to determine the relationship between the nature of schools and rates of teacher and student victimization. They found that the factors leading to increased teacher victimization were school size and ambiguous sanctions.
- The Department of Education, in its report "Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97", finds that school principals were more likely to perceive at least one discipline issue as a serious problem in schools with enrollments of more than 1,000 students. Of principals surveyed in large schools, 38% reported some serious discipline

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Setting a Great Example

Local board leads with well-reasoned support

In December of 1998, the Wisconsin Heights School District based in Mazomanie, Wisconsin set a great example for their state and for other forward-thinking school boards. The Board of Education there voted unanimously to approve a $1,000 donation to the Wisconsin Rural Challenge, a group working to secure state funding for education that is rooted in and relevant to the places where students live. While the donation is itself valuable, their statement excepted below, "Ten Reasons Why Wisconsin Heights Supports the Wisconsin Rural Challenge," is a priceless piece of public work.

Why would Wisconsin Heights commit this kind of money to support the rural challenge? Why do we believe other school districts should consider making a similar commitment?

- We believe that the citizens we represent are eager to invest in programs and projects that underscore the value of rural life, that increase the pride of our youngsters in their birthplaces, and that help rural communities increase the opportunities for gainful and fulfilling employment for their children and grandchildren within the community that educated them.
- We believe that our support of the rural challenge exemplifies and models the true role of local boards of education: to be proactive leaders of our districts, leaders who recognize and work for a goal

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School Violence

continued from page 1

problems, compared to 15% of principals in medium size schools and 10% in small schools.

- In a paper examining the correlation between school size and types of disorder, Emil J. Haller found that school size has a substantial and independent effect on student truancy and disorder.

What is it about bigger schools?

The research makes a clear connection between larger schools and violence, but the explanations for *why* that relationship exists are less clear. Intuitively, it makes sense that students in larger schools feel less connected to their teachers and their peers and feel more alienated. Warner et al. (1999) find that students feel more alienated in schools that are large, have large classrooms, experience rapid increases in enrollment, and have an inadequate student/teacher ratio. Bybee and Gee (1982) find that, in school systems where students have few rights or little say in the governance of the school, there is an increased likelihood of violence. It has been suggested that, in larger schools, students are less involved in curricular and extracurricular activities. Lower rates of participation lead to lower social integration and more negative student behavior.

What about rural schools?

During the 1996-97 school year, 17% of urban schools reported at least one serious crime, compared to 8% of rural schools. Students in urban schools experienced a rate of school-associated violent death that was nine times greater than that of their rural peers. Do rural schools experience less violence because they are rural or because they are small?

The fact that most of the research finds that urban schools are more likely to experience violence than are rural schools may be a function of the size of schools rather than the location. Haller's data analysis found that the correlation between school size and indiscipline are more significant than the correlation between ruralness and indiscipline. The National Institute for Education, in its Safe Schools report, analyzed a number of factors both in the community and within the school to determine which had the most significant impact on student violence. The majority of the factors associated with violence and disorder are located within the school. Most of the research on community influences on school violence indicates that poverty is the most significant contributor. Poverty, we know, is a problem shared by rural and urban communities alike.

Although there is a substantial gap in the numbers of serious violent crimes between rural and urban schools, the numbers of less violent or nonviolent crimes (physical attack without a weapon, theft/larceny, and vandalism) are more similar. In 1996-97, 39% of rural schools reported a less serious crime, compared to 42% of urban schools. Of principals surveyed in urban schools, 19% reported that they had serious discipline problems while 16% of rural principals reported the same. So while rural schools are less prone to violent crimes (which represent 5% of school-related crimes reported to the police) they are almost just as likely to experience less serious or nonviolent crime.

We know that large schools experience more violence. We know that rural schools experience less serious violence. But what about large rural schools? Do large, consolidated rural schools share the same characteristics as large urban and suburban schools? As with the larger question of why violence happens in schools, there are more questions than answers. Although the majority of rural schools are small, with consolidation a growing proportion of rural students will attend larger schools. The trend toward larger schools is likely to increase the risks of school violence.❖

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Positive Reinforcement Offered for Talking Back and Acting Up

In what may be a poor disciplinary example to the nation's students and teachers, *Rural Policy Matters* wants to encourage you, the people out there making good education happen, to stand up and shout at us. Let it fly. Use this newsletter to help others learn about the issues in your community or state.Your experiences may help someone in another part of the country find a better way to address difficult issues and they may be able to help you. Contact us to discuss an article idea or just send us a note about what's happening with schools and communities where you live.

Setting a Great Example

continued from page 1

greater than enlightened self-interest. We believe that it is well within the power of local boards to move beyond the local agendas that sometimes threaten to overcome the passion for educating young people–and to think and act boldly.

- We believe that, in the words of Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." We are all very aware that the very future of rural America is at risk–how can we justify anything else except bold, collective leadership and partnership to our constituents and our employees?

- We believe that the WRC story is a needed contrast to the "bigger is better" logic that has extended from factories to schools with no evidential base to substantiate it. The story of small is beautiful and the message that there is no "one size fits all" brand of education are welcome to all of us in rural communities and should be shared.

- We believe that encouraging the connections between rural schools and their communities empowers all the participants, both politically and economically. Negative feelings–isolation, disenfranchisement and disconnection, hopelessness–sap energy and diffuse focus, the very qualities needed if rural communities are to stay strong and viable.❖

Standards Symposium Report Available

The report on this winter's electronic symposium on Public School Standards: Discussing the Case for Community Control, is now available online through the Policy site at www.ruraledu.org or by contacting the Policy Program office for copies.

FCC Chair Seeks Full Funding for E-Rate

Support could still get trimmed by congress

Federal Communications Commission Chairman William Kennard has requested that the Commission seek full funding for year two of the E-rate telecommunications discounts for libraries and schools. The cap for funding full is $2.25 billion, still short of the demand for over $2.4 billion in requests from over 32,000 applicants, but significantly higher than congressional proposals that would lower it to $1.7 billion.

A Universal Service News Release on 5/5/99 states that Chairman Kennard made three points. Funding to the recommended level: 1) will allow the FCC to fund all eligible applicants at some level, while keeping the prioritization of e-rate funding on the poorest and most rural schools; 2) will protect rural schools and libraries requesting funding for internal connections; 3) will not raise consumers' bills, if balanced against access charge reductions which go into effect July 1.

"With the increase in demand, funding to the cap will enable us to continue the work of this past year," Chairman Kennard said. "Just as in Year One, all schools and libraries that apply this year will receive funding for Internet access and telecommunications services. And just as in Year One, we are keeping the focus on funding for internal connections on the poorest and most rural schools. By following this course, we will be able to wire over 528,000 classrooms to the Internet. If we meet this high demand, we will be able to help schools that teach 40 million American children."

"The only way to make sure rural schools are not left on the other side of the digital divide is to fund the e-rate to the cap," Chairman Kennard added. Sixty-five percent of rural schools and libraries that applied for e-rate funding for Year Two are in the 70 percent discount level and would not receive discounts without funding at the $2.25 billion level, Kennard added.

There is strong support for full funding from some corners. Commerce Secretary William Daley issued a statement saying his department "applauds" Kennard's effon to seek full funding because "we cannot overestimate the importance of access to the Information Age tools required to succeed in this global economy."

Original sponsors of E-rate legislation–Sens. Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), Kerrey (D-Neb.) and Snowe (R-Me.)–issued a joint statement praising Kennard's full-funding recommendation. Rockefeller said failure to fund the program fully "will result in many schools going without needed information technology."

To stay current on E-rate issues, try connecting to www.edlinc.org where the Education and Libraries Network Coalition offers links and tracks the action in Washington.❖

Small Miracles in Big Sky Country

Small school districts in Montana outperform large ones despite serving poorer communities, according to preliminary research results from "The Matthew Project." Results were reported at an April conference on education funding in Nashville, Tennessee. Because education funding is a district matter, the Nashville paper looked at district-level results.

Rarely do poorer groups outperform more affluent ones, but that's what seems to be going on in Montana, and small district size seems to be the key factor. Unlike

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other states, Montana has maintained a vigorous system of small-scale schooling (small schools and small districts). Analysis of test scores from 210 school districts serving 8th grade students fails to show the "interaction" effect between school size and poverty that is evident in California, West Virginia, and Ohio. Instead, it shows a direct negative relationship between district size and achievement across all communities–the bigger the districts, the lower the achievement.

Even more startling, the larger districts had lower average achievement levels despite having lower levels of poverty (measured by participation in free-and-reduced price lunch programs). Finally, in Montana as in the other states, the smaller districts show a much weakened relationship between poverty and overall achievement–about half the level of influence as in larger districts.

The bottom line in Montana is that: (1) smaller districts are better, generally, if overall achievement is the measure of district success; (2) the smaller, somewhat poorer districts in Montana do better than the larger, somewhat richer districts; and (3) the smaller districts achieve this small miracle more equitably than the larger districts.

The Matthew Project, sponsored by the Rural Challenge Policy Program, is testing the hypothesis that small size mitigates the negative effects of poverty. Researchers are Craig Howley (Ohio University and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory) and Robert Bickel (Marshall University, Huntington, WV). The Matthew Project involves a series of state-level analyses. The full text of the school district research will be available in June on the Rural Challenge Policy Program website at www.ruraledu.org in the "publications" section.❖

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Rural Policy Matters

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Deconsolidation Vote Scheduled in Colorado

Under the terms of rare legislation passed this year in Colorado, two school districts in Yuma County will vote in November, 2000 on whether to break up into four districts.

Voters in the East Yuma County RJ-2 District, with schools in Wray and Idalia, and in the West Yuma RJ-1 District, with schools in Yuma and in open country near Joes, will cast historic votes on whether to deconsolidate.

Each of the two districts contains two K-12 schools, one large and one small, separated by many miles. Technically, state law has long allowed the deconsolidation vote, but ironically, deconsolidation has been discouraged by a school aid formula that provides more aid per pupil to smaller schools. Under the old law, districts that deconsolidate into smaller districts were forced to accept the per pupil aid they had been receiving prior to consolidation. The new law enacted this year allows both of the smaller new districts created by certain deconsolidation votes to receive the higher per pupil aid due smaller schools under the state aid formula. Thus, the total state aid to the two new districts will be higher than was the aid to the consolidated district prior to the vote.

So won't lots of districts consider deconsolidation? No. The law was carefully crafted to limit favorable aid calculation after deconsolidation to these two Yuma County districts. It allows the new aid calculation to apply after deconsolidation only in districts with two K-12 attendance centers, one of which has fewer than 200 students. The two Yuma County districts are the only ones in the state that meet those particular criteria. These districts have maintained the smaller schools as K-12 schools because consolidating the small high schools into the larger K-12 in each district would have required many children to travel as much as two hours each way on the bus.

The new law comes at a time when there is growing public awareness of the effectiveness of smaller schools, and increased concern that larger, more impersonal schools contribute to the disturbing trends in student violence and other anti-social behavior.

Prior to the Colorado vote, each district must draw prospective boundaries for the two proposed deconsolidated districts. These boundaries, will, of course, determine whose child goes to which school, whose property is taxed in which district, and how much property valuation there is per pupil in each district, influencing the tax rate for each property owner. These are powerfully sensitive political issues. There is some logic to using the current school attendance center boundaries and bus routes as guides for the proposed new district boundaries, but there will be a "gray area" zone in which children and property could "go either way."

Proponents of deconsolidation will have to make the case that children will be better served and taxpayers generally no worse off. Rural and small school advocates everywhere will be watching these votes carefully.

The Idalia school is one of three schools participating in the Stewards of the High Plains, one of the Rural Challenge's 34 local partners around the nation. The others are Julesburg and Fleming, neither of which is affected by these deconsolidation votes.❖

Does Tracking Resegregate Schools?

New evidence reinforces the argument that separating children according to academic ability unfairly tends to segregate them by race. The emphasis in this case is on the word "unfairly."

A University of North Carolina at Charlotte sociologist analyzed the relationship between various forms of ability grouping and racial segregation in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. The analysis was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of reforms undertaken in the early 1990s as part of continuing efforts to fulfill court orders to desegregate Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools.

Dr. Roslyn Arlin Mickelson found that African-American students are disproportionately found in lower tracks than whites who had earlier scored at similar levels of achievement. She compared the twelfth grade placement in various English Language tracks (regular and advanced placement or gifted offerings) of 1,440 African-American and white students who had achieved at similar levels in English when they were in sixth grade. For the very highest group of achievers (top 10%), African-Americans were as likely or more likely than whites to be placed in higher tracks. But for

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Tracking

from page 1

each of the successively lower groups of students at similar levels of achievement, African-Americans were much less likely to be placed in higher tracks than were whites. An African-American who scored above the median in sixth grade English achievement was twice as likely as a white who achieved at a similar level to be placed in the "regular" 12th grade English track.

Miskelson concluded that the recent reforms undertaken to achieve desegregation have not reduced patterns of segregation either between or within Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools.

These issues may be less likely to plague rural schools if only because many have too few students to support a vigorous tracking system, which depends to some extent on economies of scale. Separating children into categories has never been a prominent feature of small schools. However, many rural schools are large enough to accommodate tracking, especially in the South. There, critics contend, tracking in rural schools may be undertaken in part to resegregate schools from within. Some believe that this might induce white parents to keep their children in public schools rather than send them to private academies, a process that weakens public support for public schools.

Both on its pedagogical merits and as a matter of school-community relationship, academic tracking and its administration are controversial issues. This is an area where parents and others in the community need to know what is happening in their schools and be informed participants in making policy. For more information about this issue, contact CARE (the Coalition of Alabamians Reforming Education), PO Box 323, Tyler, AL 36785, ucaringal@aol.com.❖

Accountability Report Reveals North-South Split in Rural States

States with centralized decision-making authority to control schools are more likely to have adopted all or most of the four components of a vigorous "accountability" system, while states with decentralized decision-making authority are most likely to have adopted only one or two of the components, according to an updated report on Education Accountability Systems in 50 States prepared by the Education Commission of the States.

States with more decentralized decision-making authority tend to have fewer components of a vigorous accountability system, while states with more centralized decision-making authority tend to have sterner accountability systems, according to the ECS report.

The four accountability system components ECS looked for in state policy are (1) standards in designated subject areas at specific grade levels aligned with assessments of how students are doing; (2) multiple indicators of how students, teachers, and schools are doing; (3) rewards for teachers, schools, or districts when students exceed performance standards or improve; and (4) sanctions if students fall below performance standards, or fail to show gains.

The typical features of a decentralized decision-making system, according to ECS's analysis, are local discretion, absence of authority for state education agency to supervise local districts, legislative mandates that are "significant but not overwhelming," curricular requirements that leave it to schools to decide how much time to spend on each subject, and promotion and grade placement structures left to local control.

The report reveals, but does not discuss, an interesting rural pattern in this policy area.

Of 21 rural states with at least one-third of their population living in places of less than 2,500 population, ten are classified decentralized by ECS, none of which has more than two components of an accountability system, (all three of the states with none of those components are among these), and all are New England, Corn Belt, or Great Plains-Mountain states. Another ten of these 21 rural states are judged by ECS to have centralized decision-making systems, all of which except Mississippi have at least three of the components of the model accountability system (Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, and South Carolina have all four components). Of these ten rural, aggressive accountability states, all except Indiana are in Appalachia and the Deep South. Of the 21 rural states, only Maine is among the moderately decentralized states. And it has only one of the four accountability components.

For copies of the report, contact Education Commission of the States, 707 17th ST., Suite 2700, Denver, CO, 80202-3427, call (303) 299-3600, fax (303) 296-8332, or email *ecs@ecs.org* ❖

Gifted Education in Rural Schools

The Inaugural Wallace Family National Conference on Gifted Education in Rural Schools drew several hundred participants to the Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Iowa May 21 and 22. Center Director Nicholas Colangelo briefed participants on a national assessment of gifted education in rural schools, including the results of a survey of state officials and rural educators. A copy of the report is available from the Belin-Blank Center, 210 Lindquist Center, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1529.❖

Committees of Correspondence

Your Letters from the Field

Georgia's Burke County Parent Group Affects School Bus Policies

In the spring of 1999 the Burke County School Board made several changes to bus transportation policies that will benefit children traveling to school from Keysville, Georgia a predominantly African American rural community approximately 25 miles from the nearest public school located in the County seat. The Board will now provide a late bus for all Keysville students participating in after-school activities, add a new Keysville bus route (lessening the hour-long trip each way), and hire bus monitors.

These changes resulted from the organizing efforts of the Center for Children and Education and the Burke County Parent Group on Public Education, organized in September 1998 by parents disturbed by the County's exceptionally high bus and school suspension and dropout rates.* Many parents specifically became involved because they felt their children had been unfairly disciplined, often resulting in bus and school suspensions which, in turn, lead to chronic absenteeism and grade retention. After investigating problems around school bus transportation, parents determined that bus discipline problems were typically due to lengthy bus rides and lack of adequate supervision on the bus. Parents also learned that disciplinary action frequently occurred without due process or parental notification. Additionally, there was no available transportation for children to participate in after-school programs.

In light of these problems, the Parent Group met for several months examining their children's educational rights and the need for school reforms. Parents rode school buses, attended school board meetings, requested the board appoint a working committee to address issues of concern to them, filed an open records act against the superintendent's office in order to obtain statistical information, met with students and bus drivers to get their input, and drafted a "Request for Action" for the school board' s review.

Until the Parent Group was organized many parents, intimidated by school officials, did not exercise their power to influence school policy issues. Policy decisions had been left to the county superintendent and school board members. The efforts of the Parent Group have contributed to the involvement of many parents in school policy-making process, the election of an African American majority to the local school board for the first time, and the opportunity to select a new superintendent.

Using the bus issues as a spring board for addressing more complicated issues in the future, the Parent Group is committed to increasing the knowledge, skills, and capacity of grassroots leaders to influence other education policies and to initiate additional needed reforms. The Parent Group's ongoing plans to create a dialogue about emerging issues include networking with other communities addressing similar issues, holding community forums, and bringing in inspirational speakers.

—Sarah Bobrow-Williams and Shirley Wright

*In 1997-98, Burke County had 4829 students of which 31% were white and 67% were African American. In that school year, 195 Burke County students dropped out of school, 29% white and 70% African American; 395 students were retained in school (8% of all students), 21% white and 78% African American; and of 131 Alternative School placements, 7% were white and 92% were African American.

To contact the Burke County Parent Group, call Shirley Wright, 706.547.2207, or Sarah Bobrow-Williams, 4729 Quaker Road, Keysville, GA 30816 or email: sbobrow@msn.com. For more information on education issues in Georgia, call Brian Kintisch at the Center for Children and Education, 912.750.1007, or email: GaSchools@aol.com

In Revolutionary America, colonists often communicated their news and ideas through well organized circular letters that reached far into rural areas and provided clear evidence of unity in the cause of freedom. These columns serve similar purposes. They include views of the writers, and not always those of the Rural Challenge.

National School Boards Association:

"Rethinking the Role of Schools in Society"

There are over 95,000 school board members across the United States who represent their respective communities and actively participate in the governance of their local public schools. Most school board members are elected by the community, though a small percent are appointed. And in all cases, one main task of school board members, whether from urban, suburban or rural areas, is to act as the cultural bridge between communities and local schools.

Many school board members participate in events sponsored by the National School Boards Association (NSBA). NSBA provides service to these local boards, publishes numerous newsletters and journals, and acts as a national lobbying organization to promote "equity and excellence in public education."

Each year the NSBA sponsors an annual conference that provides a

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NSBA

from page 3

wide array of training and workshops. Also at that meeting, state delegates gather to decide on officers, policies, beliefs and resolutions that guide the activities of the national organization.

This year in San Francisco, the NSBA Delegate Assembly adopted a "belief" statement that closely mirrors the basic philosophy of the Rural Challenge, and in fact, recognizes the Rural Challenge as its impetus. The following "belief and policy" statement was overwhelmingly approved for adoption by NSBA this April:

Subject: Linking Schools with Community

Issue: Rethinking the role of schools in society.

Policy: NSBA supports efforts that are dedicated to enhancing the ways that public schools unite youth and adults in shaping healthy communities around the principles of service to others, sustainable environments, social justice and civic duty.

Statement of Reasons: The visions of the Annenberg Rural Challenge may serve as a model for strengthening neighborhoods and communities in rural and urban areas.

That the NSBA has officially recognized, and will work to encourage, the critical and mutually beneficial relationship between strong healthy communities and their local schools is a heartening development. Hopefully school board members everywhere can begin to see their grassroots work as part of this larger effort to foster vibrant communities.❖

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RPM 1.6

Rural Policy Matters

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Over $10 Billion Spent Annually On Busing Kids

Schools in the United States spend about as much on transporting children as feeding them and more than half-again as much as they spend on loan interest. In 1995-96, the latest year for which data is available, U.S. schools spent nearly $10.4 billion transporting students, $10.6 billion feeding them, and only $6.3 billion on interest.

This is data derived from the National Council on Education Statistics by Cornell University researchers John Sipple and Kieran Killeen for the Rural Challenge. Leading transportation spenders were New York ($1.2 bil.), California ($769 mil.), Pennsylvania ($544 mil.), Texas ($522 mil), all with large rural populations scattered across wide spaces.

But smaller, even more rural states topped the list of those whose transportation costs were highest when measured as a percentage of their total spending on education. West Virginia leads the pack, allocating over 6.4% of its current public school expenditures on transportation. Kentucky (5.8%), Delaware (5.8%), Indiana (5.7%) and Missouri (5.6%) round out the top five.

Transportation costs are particularly important to rural schools whose smallness already contributes to higher per pupil costs. Overall, the annual per pupil cost of transportation in all school districts was $296, but it was higher in rural school districts ($324), lowest in urban districts ($161), and in-between in suburban districts ($268). The difference between the per pupil transportation costs in rural districts and urban districts was equal to one-fourth of their differential in per-pupil instruction costs. In rural versus suburban districts, the transportation cost differential was equal to over one-third their instruction cost differential.

Statewide district average per pupil transportation expenditures are lowest in California and in a band of southern states running from North Carolina to Texas (but excluding Louisiana), and highest in the Northeast, North Central, and Northwestern states.

About 60 percent of public school children are bused in the United States, and the cost of school busing–after adjusting for inflation–continues to grow each year at the expense of other parts of the budget. Every dollar spent on transportation is a dollar not spent on instruction or on rebuilding the sagging infrastructure of American's schools.❖

What's In a Name?

Send us your contact names to help build a national database of rural education advocates. Extra copies of this newsletter are available to distribute to groups.

WV Methodists Support Shorter Bus Rides

There are many ways to influence public policy and public opinion. To effect long-term changes, sometimes the best route is not only to go to the capitol, but also to work on building broad support from a diverse constituency. As the West Virginia Challenge newsletter reports below, education advocates in that state have found allies among the religious community.

At its Annual Conference in June, the West Virginia United Methodist Church ratified a resolution calling for a law limiting school bus travel times for students. The resolution resulted from the efforts of Amelia Anderson, who serves as a mentor with other education activists working in the Challenge West Virginia project.

"When I learned students in my home county of Webster were on a school bus from three to four hours a day, I felt it was an isolated situation," Mrs. Anderson told Conference members. "When i joined Challenge West Virginia, I learned many rural counties had students on buses for long periods of time."

"I feel the state of West Virginia should establish a law concerning the time a student spends on a school bus one way," she said. "There are recommendations, but they are not law and are often ignored. This law should include that the School Building Authority must consider bus travel times before new school building projects are funded."

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Federal News

The School Modernization Bills

There are several major bills before Congress now that address concerns about school facilities including three that are similar: S. 226 introduced by Senator Lautenberg, S. 551 introduced by Senator Feinstein, and H.R. 1160, introduced by Congressman Charles Rangel. Let's look briefly at the highlights of the Rangel bill, signed by 88 other representatives, and known as the Public School Modernization Act of 1999, to get a sense of this legislation.

In his opening remarks about his bill, Rangel stated, "Many children today are attending school in trailers or in dilapidated school buildings. We cannot expect learning to take place in those environments....Using tax credits, this bill would provide $24 billion in interest-free funds for school modernization projects. The bill is a meaningful first step."

HR 1660 is very similar to the QZAB (Qualified Zone Academy Bond) legislation passed two years ago. [see *RPM* May 99] Like the QZABs, The School Modernization Act is based on the idea that the US government can give a tax credit to a lending institution, which will then lend money to a state or local education agency (LEA) at zero percent interest for qualified projects. Congressman Rangel's office notes that half the cost of a 15-year loan can be interest payment, so possible savings are significant. Like the QZAB legislation, HR 1660 aims to encourage local participation. The act requires that local businesses contribute goods or services equivalent to 10% of the bond to the school. As with QZABs no new bureaucracy is required, and districts within a designated Enterprise Zone, or Economic Community are eligible as are any districts in which it can reasonably be expected that 35% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch.

- *How much money are we talking about?* As written, H.R. 1660 would seek an authorization of $1.4 billion in 2000 and 2001, though the actual appropriation will likely fall well below that figure. And in addition, Qualified School Construction Bonds, in a separate but related program will receive up to $11 billion in 2000 and 2001.

- *How does the program work?* The money for these programs would be allocated according to complex formulas, with eligibility based on the number of low-income children in a state or LEA. The state or an LEA can apply for the money, but it must submit an inventory of facilities within its authority, as well as other demographic information. The lending institution receives a federal tax credit for money it loans, so it does not have to charge interest. The money can be used for a wide variety of purposes: the QZAB money can be used for "constructing, rehabilitating, or repairing the public school facility, ...acquiring the land, ...providing equipment, ...developing course materials, ...training teachers and other school personnel.

- *What problems are there in this bill for small, rural schools?* One problem is that about half of the money is designated for large LEAs and Enterprise Zones, which, of course, tend to be in urban areas. Another is that states and districts with a well-established program of aid for facilities and well-trained staff may be able to access money much more easily than districts and states that lack infrastructure and experience in facilities programs. Furthermore, because monitoring is limited to IRS checks for eligibility for the tax credit, as with the existing QZABs, the program may be poorly advertised and supervised, and under-used by potential beneficiaries.

- *What should we do?* Evaluate the current legislation for yourself, and write and call your representatives with your reactions. Although there are problems we have identified already, still this is comprehensive legislation that could make significant money available for rehabilitation and construction of school facilities, while leaving decisions up to LEAs. Let us know what you think.

To contact Congressman Rangel's Office, call John Buckley at 202.225.4021.

To check on the status of this or any other bill and to get the full text try using Thomas (as in Jefferson) the government's legislation tracking website at the Library of Congress, http://thomas.loc.gov ❖

Bus Rides

continued from page 1

Mrs. Anderson said that many members of the West Virginia Conference of United Methodists were shocked to learn that students were on school buses for so long each day.

She said she expects the United Methodist Board of Church and Society to address the issues raised in the resolution. The Church and Society Board said in its report, it "sees the need for our Annual Conference and society to address the large issue of public education in our state, including funding, busing, consolidation and quality of life and learning."

Challenge West Virginia is a project of Covenant House in Charleston, West Virginia and receives funding in part from the Rural Challenge Policy Program. Contact Linda Martin at 304.744.5916 or email LBM94@aol.com.❖

Pass It On

Recycle this newsletter and pass it on to friends and colleagues. Please let us know of anyone who should receive a copy.

Your Letters from the Field

Committees of Correspondence

Housing Development and Re-segregation

A report from activists working in Tunica County, Mississippi

Why would anyone in Tunica County, Mississippi, want to build a new, state of the art, public elementary school where children do not yet live, in houses not yet built, in a neighborhood which does not yet exist?

The Tunica County school district, with active support from the State Board of Education, wants to use the building of a new elementary school to attract upper- and middle-income white families from the region to reside in a virtually all-white enclave, designed to encircle the proposed new school. A 1996 housing study revealed that white families are refusing to move to north Tunica unless they can be guaranteed that their children will not have to go to a majority black public school. Major housing construction in north Tunica has stalled awaiting the outcome over the fight to locate the proposed new school.

If successful, the "Tunica plan" could become a model throughout the state, and the south, for re-segregating the public schools. The school district, in collaboration with the plantation owners, picked a site in north Tunica on land owned by the largest plantation owner. The plantation owner then proceeded to drive his tenants off the land and opposes the development of any suitable, affordable low income housing in that area of the county. The plantation owners in the area then registered subdivision plans for the development of new housing totaling more than 1,000 new units, with purchase prices in the $90,000 to $140,000 range, and townhouse unit rentals ranging from $650 to $750. These prices are far beyond the economic capacity of the black community, where the best jobs available to most black families pay less than $18,000 per year.

Developers claim that the housing will be available to anyone who wants to live there. But, very few, if any, black families will be able to afford to live there. Therefore, the families moving into the area will be virtually all white. The 1971 federal court school desegregation order requires that the students be assign-

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Public Policy Principles of the Rural Challenge

We've been thinking about the principles that guide the public policy work of the Rural Challenge and trying to express them as a series of conditions we seek to achieve and others we seek to avoid through public policy. Below are some examples, with more to follow in later issues. Why not help us by commenting on these, or coming up with some of your own. We could use the help! Send us your comments.

Conditions We Seek to Achieve Through Public Policy	***Conditions We Seek to Avoid Through Public Policy***
All children should have access to equal educational opportunity notwithstanding where they live, the color of their skin, the language they speak, or how wealthy their parents or their neighbors are. Rural children are not denied access to equal educational opportunity because they live in poor, sparsely settled, remote, isolated, distant, lonely, quiet, plain places.	Access to educational opportunity is a function of where a child lives, the color of his or her skin, the language he or she speaks, or how well off her/his parents or their neighbors are. Rural children are expected to move or migrate daily to places of better educational opportunity.
Schools should be governed by the people they serve, with the expectation that they will accept the duty to govern well. School governing bodies reflect the composition of the community the school serves.	Schools are governed by experts or officials who do not know the people or the place the school serves and do not reflect the character of the community.
Schools should be small enough so that every adult who teaches or leads in them can know every child, every child's participation is needed and/or wanted, and most important decisions can be discussed by everyone affected at one time and in one place and a change in school policy can be implemented by mutual consent.	Schools are too big to accommodate participation by all but a few in most voluntary activities and almost all important decisions, student contact with adults is highly structured and limited, and many children are not known even by their teachers

Re-segregation

continued from page 3

ed by zones or districts in relation to where the children live. Therefore, the new school will be surrounded by white families, whose numbers will exceed the 550 student capacity of the new school, ensuring that the student body will be virtually all white.

In 1998 the school district asked the US Justice Department to approve the location of the proposed elementary school. On behalf of the black community. Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, with support from the Mississippi Education Working Group and Southern Echo, opposed the location of the proposed school. The community proposed three alternate sites which would ensure that the black community would be an integral part of the student body and the environment of the new elementary school. The school district refused to consider these sites. But the Justice Department issued a determination letter in September, 1998, that the school district's proposed site in north Tunica would promote the re-segregation of the public schools.

At the beginning of 1999, the state's attorney general, Mike Moore, intervened to try to get the Justice Department to change its mind. The community is awaiting another determination by the Justice Department. The community expects that the state will move in federal court for approval of the site, if the Justice Department continues to disapprove the site.

To contact the Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, call Melvin Young at 601.363.6059. For more information on the broader issues raised here, contact Mike Sayer with Southern Echo, 601.334.6827.❖

Committees of Correspondence columns include views of the writers, and not always those of the Rural Challenge.

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Rural Policy Matters

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Local Control and School Boards

Local control is a concept that tends to generate extreme loyalty or, conversely, high anxiety. Definitions of local control vary depending on who is doing the "defining" and for what purpose. The concept may include control over curriculum, direct voting on the district budget, input into hiring the administration, ability to locally define assessment plans, etc. Many of these areas are powers traditionally assigned to school board members. Thus the question emerges: To what degree *are* school boards agents of local control?

The Rural Challenge Policy Program has been investigating this question using a survey sent to executive directors of the state school boards associations. We have developed several measures of local control that are being combined with other national data.

One index of local control is the number of students per school board member, a second is the number of schools that school boards govern. Both offer general indications of how "close" school boards and school board members are to the community, to the local schools and to the students. This data was collected on a state-level that necessarily obscures the wide range of variation within states. The analysis is not complete–there are still some gaps in the data with 36 of 50 states responding thus far. Preliminary results, however, illuminate some interesting trends.

- On the average, each school board member in the responding states is responsible for 728 students. There is a wide range among states, however. The highest ratio is in Maryland with an average of 4599 students per school board member. Vermont has the lowest ratio of 74:1.
- Seven other states have high student to board ratios (over 1000 students per school board member). They are Nevada, Virginia, Georgia, West Virginia, Louisiana, Alabama and South Carolina.
- Eight states have low ratios (less than 300 students per board member): Montana, Wyoming, Kansas, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Arkansas.
- Variation within each state can be enormous, though not specifically examined in this research study. One respondent noted that in his state, Washington, there is one district (with one board) with 10 students, and another with 46,000 students.
- On the average, each school board is responsible for 9.5 schools. Again there is a wide range among states with Maryland and Vermont at the extremes. Maryland has the highest ratio with 53 schools for each school board and Vermont has the fewest (.96 schools per school board).
- Five other states have a high ratio (more than 14 schools per school board) on this measure: Virginia, West Virginia, Nevada, Utah and Louisiana.
- Three states have very low ratios (fewer than four schools per school board): Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, and Arkansas.
- Illinois, Kansas, South Dakota and Wisconsin also have low ratios with fewer than five schools per schools board.

Regional analysis indicates that the North Central region tends to have the

continued on page 3

School Size and Violence

NC Governor Hunt Recognizes the Connection

Jim Hunt, Governor of North Carolina, recently pressed a second time for smaller schools as a means for improving school safety. According to a report in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, Hunt argued for schools where "kids are real people that folks know. I think most of our schools are too big," he said, arguing that North Carolina's large high schools, which frequently house 1,600 students, be "cut in half." To make use of existing buildings, Hunt suggested that big schools be divided into smaller separate schools, even if it increased costs. This puts Hunt in company with small schools researchers who tout many positive benefits of smaller schools, such as more positive attitudes about school, fewer behavior problems and improved personal relations. (For more information about small schools research, see Kathleen Cotton's *School Size, School Climate and Student Performance*, available in the Publications section of www.ruraledu.org.)

Hunt made his remarks as he was receiving a report from a task force on school safety, chaired by Crime Control Secretary Richard Moore. The task force was charged with creating a set of recommendations for schools to ensure greater student safety.

Hunt's remarks distinguish him as the first governor reported to call for a look at school size as a safety issue, a move that could be significant as North Carolina

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Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Rules In Support of E-Rate

A Win for Rural Schools and Libraries

On July 30, 1999 the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Federal Communications Commission's implementation of the 1996 Telecommunications Act regarding subsidies for schools and libraries. In question was the FCC's interpretation of the '96 Telecom Act that involved the "E-Rate", as the Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries has been known.

In the decision, Texas Office of Public Utility Counsel, et al. v. FCC, (Case No. 97-60421), the court rejected most challenges to the May 8, 1997 Federal Communications Commission's Report and Order on Universal Service finding that the FCC had acted properly and within the 1996 law's existing, but ambiguous, constraints.

This ruling came in response to the lawsuit brought more than two years ago (June 1997) by 19 petitioners, including Southwestern Bell, GTE, Bell Atlantic, Cincinnati Bell and BellSouth. As of the date of the ruling, however, GTE remained the sole local exchange company litigant. The Baby Bells had gradually all withdrawn from the case, perhaps seeing the futility of their appeal.

Among the 77 entities petitioning for intervention in the case was the Education and Library Coalition (EdLiNC), of which the Rural Challenge is a member. Largely due to its well-organized opposition to the legal challenge to the E-Rate and its support of the FCC, EdLiNC helped secure the final ruling of the 5th Circuit and in so doing helped to insure the availability of E-Rate discounts to schools and libraries.

In summary, the E-Rate-relevant 5th Circuit Court rulings included:

The obligation of telephone carriers to contribute to the universal service fund was determined *not* to be an unconstitutional tax.

At the core of the lawsuit, this contention helped fuel the label of the "Gore Tax" among conservative legislators and others. The appeals court, however, put the unfair tax issue led by CelPage to rest, declaring that the fees are collected from telecommunications companies who all ultimately benefit from a wider telecom-munications network.

The FCC was permitted to include Internet access and internal connections in the discount program.

GTE argued that the FCC exceeded its authority by allowing E-rate funds to support Internet services, rather than basic telecommunications services. The 5th Circuit refuted the position of GTE and the Baby Bells, ruling that Internet access and internal connections did constitute telecommunications services and should therefore be considered as E-Rate eligible services.

The FCC has the authority to permit non-telecommunications carriers to receive payments from the universal service fund if they provide services eligible for discounts.

The litigants' primary opposition to the funding of internal wiring was that the work involved in such wiring need not be done by telecommunications providers. Indeed, any commercial company or vendor could be reimbursed for the internal wiring of schools or libraries from E-Rate funds, even though only telecommunications companies are required to pay into the fund.

The FCC is permitted to use the federal universal service fund to support intrastate services.

At issue here was the jurisdictional division between the interstate role of the FCC and the intrastate role of the state public service commissions. It was ruled that even though the FCC had power only over interstate jurisdictions, they were permitted to enable a federal universal service fund, e.g., the E-Rate, to support services within states.

Under a previous court decision, the FCC is permitted to make "all commercially available services" eligible for discounts.

Rather than restrict the type or bandwidth of E-Rate eligible telecommunications services, the 5th Circuit agreed that it was within the jurisdiction of the FCC to include all commercially available telecommunications services as E-Rate-eligible services.

The FCC was *not* upheld in its decision to include intrastate revenue in the base for calculating carrier contribution to the program.

In its sole denial of FCC rulings (with relevance to the E-Rate), the 5th Circuit determined that the FCC could no longer require that telecommunications carriers who contribute to the fund base their contribution on their combined inter- and intra-state revenue. All subsequent contributions will be solely based on interstate, e.g., long-distance, revenue.

What do the 5th Circuit decisions mean for the future of the E-Rate? It means the near future is solid for schools and libraries that are likely to receive a record $2.25 billion in E-Rate discounts this year. Still in question is the effect of *not* including the intrastate revenue base in the calculation of telephone company contributions to the fund. Realistically, two options remain. Either the fund will be scaled back to reflect the same contribution rate on a smaller revenue base or the contribution rate will be increased in order to retain the availability of funds at its legislated cap of $2.25 billion.

Either way, one thing is certain, regardless of the 5th Circuit ruling: the longer-term future of the E-rate will continue to be challenged. Legislation introduced earlier this year by Sen. Conrad Burns (R-MT) and Rep. Billy Tauzin (R-LA) attempts to severely curtail E-rate funding, impose a sunshine limit, and move its funding base to a telephone excise tax. Perhaps it should be of some consolation that the most recent attempts to derail the program, like the Burns/Tauzin bills, are less catastrophic. But then again, why squander this unparalleled opportunity to bring schools and libraries into the information age in the way envisioned in the Telecom Act?❖

School Size

continued from page 1

continues to experience tremendous growth which is spilling out into formerly rural areas of the state. School safety raises design issues for all schools. Rather than build fortresses, however, it's time for school officials look at issues of school size, community use and ownership. Crime Control Secretary Moore said that his task force "did not feel (it) had the expertise to make specific recommendations" on school size. Hunt has opened the door for small school advocates interested in educating policy makers.❖

Local Control

continued from page 1

most local control on both these measures. This region includes Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Further analysis will examine the specific authority granted school boards in state statutes as well as the presence or absence of influential specific interest groups. For more details on this research report, please check online on the Publications page at www.ruraledu.org or call the Policy Program office.❖

Rachel Tompkins to Lead Rural Challenge

The Board of Trustees of the Rural Challenge has announced the appointment of Dr. Rachel B.Tompkins as our new president.

A native West Virginian,Tompkins has long been involved in work on behalfof children, schools, and communities. She will assume the presidency of the Rural Challenge on Oct. 1, 1999, succeeding Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal of Granby, Colorado, who have jointly led the organization since itsfounding in 1995. Tompkins has served as Vice Chair of the Rural Challenge board during that time.

"We are tremendously pleased that Rachel Tompkins has accepted our invitation to lead the Rural Challenge into the future," said Jack Murrah, chairman of the organization's Board of Trustees. "Her career in organizational leadership, rural education, and community development is well matched to our mission, and her service on the Rural Challenge board has prepared her well to move us forward quickly."❖

Six Principles of School Design

In 1998 educators, architects, planners, parents, teachers, students and community people met to consider elements of good school design. Their discussions led, in fall of 1998, to definition of six principles of design that were "consolidated and confirmed" at the October 1998 National Symposium on School Design called by the U.S. Department of Education and the American Institute of Architects.

The design principles are based on three conditions:
1. Learning is a lifelong process,
2. Design is always evolving, and
3. Resources are limited.

The six principles guide school design processes to:
- Enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners.
- Serve as centers of community.
- Result from a planning/design process involving all stakeholders.
- Provide for health, safety and security.
- Make effective use of all available resources.
- Allow for flexibility and adaptability to changing needs.

Let us know what you think of these principles and ways in which your district may have adopted any of them. In the future we will look at these more deeply and give examples of innovative practice from rural communities around the country. Contact us at policy.program@ruraledu.org and share your own experiences.❖

Grassroots Advocates Work to Impact State Reform Commission

Georgia groups mobilized by concerns over representation

In March 1999, Governor Roy Barnes of Georgia set up the Education Reform Study Commission, an appointed group of 63 people charged with the task of assess-ing the success of reform efforts in the state and charting a course for future action and legislation. The Center for Children and Education (CCE), a Rural Challenge grant recipient, has serious concerns about the make-up of the Commission and its ability to adequately represent rural, minority, and low-income people's interests.

CCE is concerned that the Commission is made up of representatives of 10 school systems that in general are much richer, whiter, larger, and more metropolitan than a representative statewide sample would be.

To make up for the shortfall in representation, CCE is working with grassroots community groups, providing training to enhance their member's abilities to effectively participate in the Commission's public hearings. On August 2, 1999, about 15 parents and community members from grassroots groups attended the Commission's public hearing in Albany, Georgia, testifying to the needs of rural and minority communities. Other input will follow.

According to CCE the specific problems with the make-up of the Commission include the following items.

The School systems represented on the Commission are much bigger than the average school system in Georgia:
- The average school system in Georgia enrolls 7,481 students.
- The average student enrollment of the 10 systems represented on the Commission is 24,960.

The school systems represented on the Commission show signs of severe racial disparities:
- 37% of all public school students in Georgia are African-American.

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Grassroots Advocates

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- 11% of all gifted students in Georgia public schools are African-American.
- 7% of the gifted students in the in the 10 Commission school systems are African-American, and this number falls to 4% when Dougherty County is excluded.
- 19.7% of all public school teachers in Georgia are African-American.
- 11.7% of the teachers employed in the 10 Commission school systems are African-American. This number falls to 7% w County is excluded.

In a found that the school systems represented on the Commission include fewer minority students and fewer students living in poverty than the average school system in Georgia.

All statistics in CCE's analysis were obtained from the Georgia Department of Education. You can reach the Center for Children and Education by email to GaSchools@aol.com or by calling Brian Kintisch at 912.750.1007.❖

Climbing the Barriers

What's in the way of place-based learning?

While we hear about dozens of success stories where learning is rooted in communities, we also know it's not always easy. As our book of policy profiles, *Standing Up for School and Community*, points out, you can run into obstacles in the most unexpected places. It's challenging enough to try new teaching techniques or to put in the extra effort to build bridges between schools and their communities without running into rules and regulations that seem engineered against work in small rural communities. Unfortunately, these barriers show up everywhere, ranging from minor annoyances to major roadblocks. For some it may be class scheduling, for others it's transportation, credits, or insurance. We are collecting stories about the barriers people face as they attempt to implement place-based learning projects in rural schools and communities. Are there rules or regulations that you feel get in the way of helping students, schools, and communities learn together? Let us hear about them.❖

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Rural Policy Matters

October 1999 — A Newsletter of Rural School & Community Action — www.ruraledu.org

Nebraska Alliance Organizes, Energizes Rural School Advocates

Leading rural, farm, and education activists in Nebraska have launched a broad based coalition to "build the capacity of rural people to fight for adequate, equitable, and quality rural education and community development as defined and developed by rural people themselves." The Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education involves grassroots organizing, policy research, training for rural activists, and work with the news media.

Nebraska school politics has long centered on consolidation and finance issues. Rural areas have often been divided and conquered by one legislative measure after another, each creating a new set of victims and a more entrenched and vulnerable set of survivors among rural schools. The state still has the second largest number of rural school districts, but they are disappearing to consolidation faster than in any other state. This trend is prompted largely by changes in the funding formula and a recent constitutional amendment that caps property tax levies.

Key to the Alliance's strategy is doing solid, empirical research that debunks the notion that small schools are "expensive" to operate. It recently prepared an analysis showing that because larger districts have higher dropout rates, their cost per pupil ***graduated*** is higher than for most smaller districts. (See "What Does It Really Cost.")

But while policy research is important, most of the Alliance's effort goes into grassroots organizing and training, focusing on school board members and community volunteers. They live in approximately 80 districts across the state that have lost more than 10 percent of their base revenue since 1997-98 school year due to changes in the aid formula. Training sessions are designed both to sharpen leaders' ability to analyze rural education issues and to increase their effectiveness as advocates.

The Alliance is also exploring ways of working with urban school activists, many of whom have recently focused on getting the Omaha and Lincoln school boards to build smaller, more neighborhood-based schools.

Although school finance issues must ultimately be won in the legislature, the Alliance is developing the legal theory to challenge Nebraska's school finance system's constitutionality. Prior litigation in Nebraska has been unsuccessful, but the Alliance believes that a new equal protection clause, added only recently, can be coupled with the state's education clause calling for a system of "common" schools to support equity litigation.

The organizational members of the Alliance are politically diverse, ranging from the more conservative Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation to the more liberal Nebraska Farmers Union. It includes the Center for Rural Affairs, a nonprofit advocacy organization with a broad rural policy and development agenda, as well as more education-centered rural groups, including the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, Friends of Rural Education, and the Nebraska School

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What Does it Really Cost to Graduate a High School Student?

Small schools perform well (and relatively inexpensively) in Nebraska

Big schools spend less than small schools to open the doors and let kids find a seat every morning, and there are lots of economies of scale studies that say so. But what does it cost to actually teach a student, and to do it well enough to graduate that student, and maybe even get that student into college?

New research done for the Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education finds that small schools measure up very well against their big neighbors when the cost of schooling is measured as the cost per graduate.

Smaller districts are common in Nebraska. The state has just 12 districts with high school populations over 1000, only 22 with high school populations over 600; and 246 districts with populations under 600. Sixty-three districts have fewer than 70 students. According to research done for the Alliance by independent consultant Patricia Funk and Center for Rural Affairs analyst Jon Bailey, this is an educational endowment worth protecting. Funk and Bailey compared outcomes from different size districts, including only K-12 districts so that expenditures for districts of all sizes would be consistent.

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Cost to Graduate

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They learned that the smaller the district, the higher the graduation rates, and the higher the percentage of students going on to college and other post-secondary institutions.

High school dropout rates go up as school size goes up in Nebraska. High schools with under 70 students graduate 97% of them. Those with over 1000 students graduate 84%. The big break is at about 600 students. Those with fewer than 600 graduate over 90%. Those with more than 600 graduate less than 80%.

Because larger Nebraska districts have higher dropout rates, their annual cost per pupil ***graduated*** is higher than for most smaller districts. Districts with 1000 or more high school students spent less per pupil per year than smaller districts, but because of that 16% dropout rate, had higher annual costs per graduating student than high schools with as few as 100 students. The lowest annual cost per graduate was achieved by schools with between 300 and 599 students in high school. Even districts with between 100 and 300 high school students are actually cheaper per graduate than their big neighbors with over 1000 high school students. Only districts with fewer than 100 students had higher costs per graduate than the largest districts (but they did graduate 97% of their students).

And these small districts not only pump out the graduates, but they send them on to post-secondary schools. Using data on enrollment by county in Nebraska institutions of post-secondary education, Funk and Bailey computed the post-secondary enrollment rate for graduates from counties based on average high school size in the county. In counties with larger high schools, the college enrollment rate for graduates was lower. The exception is Lancaster County, the seat of state government and the University of Nebraska. Again, the smallest schools sent the most graduates to college. Those with under 100 students sent about 70% to college.

Despite their obvious effectiveness, small schools in Nebraska are under political siege by those who believe faithfully that when it comes to schooling, bigger is cheaper. State policy makers have persisted in crimping funds to smaller districts. As Funk and Bailey note, "the state aid to education distribution formula penalizes most small schools for any above average per pupil costs." The logic has been that smaller schools are more expensive and presumably like a lot of small inefficient systems, they should merge and become more efficient. This is the basic, age-old thinking of school closure and school and district consolidation.

Funk and Bailey also analyzed the real costs of high school dropouts to the state of Nebraska. They consider the loss of income to non-high school graduates, the numbers who participate in public assistance programs, and the number of dropouts in prison and their annual costs of incarceration. Keeping these kids in school would be a real cost savings in many ways. If high school dropouts had graduated instead, and participated in public assistance programs at no greater the rate than other high school graduates do, there would be 35,000 fewer Nebraskans receiving public assistance at an annual savings of $130 million in that social program alone, not including Medicaid and housing assistance.

These social "costs" of dropping out will always be higher than the per-graduate costs of even the smallest high schools. The money spent on these remedial and penal systems would be better spent on small high schools in small districts that can produce graduates and send them on for postsecondary education. Or at least, as Funk and Bailey more modestly conclude, "it is essential that we not discriminate against small schools in the distribution of state aid when the student outcomes for most of these schools are so positive."

Though it is sometimes forgotten in our market-driven policy climate, schools are not operated primarily to make money, or save money. Presumably they operate to educate the young people of the state to be productive, responsible citizens. Ignoring that cost for the sake of petty gains in per pupil expenditure is pennywise, and pound foolish.❖

Nebraska Alliance

continued from page 1

Finance Coalition. The Nebraska Community Foundation provides an administrative home for the Alliance and the Nebraska Rural Development Commission actively supports training and research components.

The Alliance is supported in part by a grant from the Rural Challenge. About half the schools that participate in the School at the Center, a Rural Challenge school improvement partner in Nebraska, are also active in the Alliance, according to School at the Center project director Jerry Hoffman. Many of the School at the Center schools are among the 80 that have been adversely affected by recent changes in Nebraska's school finance formula..❖

Research and Advocacy on Education Reform Grants Available

The Poverty & Race Research Action Council, a national public interest group, is taking applications for grants of up to $10,000 for social science research looking at the intersection of race and poverty. Research must be designed to support a planned concrete advocacy agenda—community organizing, legislation, public education, etc.

For more information, contact PRRAC Executive Director Chester Hartman through email to chartman@prrac.org or by calling 202.387.9887.❖

Your Letters from the Field

Committees of Correspondence

When Bad Things Happen to Good People

Communities Creating Connections, Idaho County, Idaho

The Recipe: Begin with a single county that contains 8,539 square miles–larger than New Jersey or Massachusetts, area enough to contain eight Rhode Islands. Have 80% of the land base owned by state and federal governments, mostly in the form of the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. Include designated wilderness and other roadless areas approaching four million acres. Add the two deepest gorges in the United States (the Snake River's Hells Canyon and that of the wild Salmon River) and elevations ranging from 1000 feet to over 8000 feet. Sprinkle across the land a total of 14,000 residents. Carve out much of the county as a school district. Stir in an increasing number of retirees from other states seeking a rural life but not historically tied to their new communities. Include an estimated ten-percent of the school-aged population being home-schooled and a vocal group of residents philosophically opposed to any form of property tax. Add record low commodity prices for grain and cattle. Finally, reduce timber harvest on federal lands by 80 percent, with a corresponding drop in federal forest receipts paid to the county for roads and schools. And when two attempts to pass a school override levy fail, cut a million dollars worth of staff and supplies and hot lunches and maintenance and extra-curricular activities.

The Results: Unfortunately, this is a true story–and a new reality for Joint School District 241 in Idaho County, Idaho. While not all of these elements may be part of the story of your rural school district, some of these same factors may be leading to similar budget woes. Resulting problems can be greater than financial, however. In District 241, for example, our citizens are now divided into "yes" and "no" voters, with letters to local newspapers continuing to exacerbate the conflict. The district is itself divided into "yes" communities and "no" communities, with serious consideration being given to dividing the district in two. With much ingen-uity and hard work, local boosters in the three communities with high schools have raised the funds necessary to support many school activities. They recognize, however, that continued fund-raising of this magnitude from such a small community will become more difficult as people reach the limits of their charitable giving. Meanwhile, financial contributions to other ongoing community efforts have significantly dwindled.

The Recommendations: On a broader scale, the continuing local and national argument about the amount of timber that should be harvested from our national forests becomes even more emotional as "getting out the cut" or preserving roadless areas becomes tied to children's hot lunches and school sports activities. Potential dialogue about how to create a preferred community future can become lost in angry debate and diatribe.

Challenges do present opportunities, and opportunities can lead to positive change. However, if many of the above characteristics describe your community, you may be wise to engage in some healthy dialogue about your schools and community before a crisis renders such dialogue difficult, if not impossible. If your school funding has historically relied upon payments from the federal government that were based upon the extraction of natural resources from public property, you would be wise as well to pursue politically a means of reasonable and reliable payment in lieu of taxes by the federal government.❖

See contact information on page 4

Community Response to a Funding Crisis

What happens in Kooskia, Idaho, (a small rural community of about 1800 citizens in the town and surrounding valleys and ridges) when the school budget drops by ten percent, eliminating professional and paraprofessional staff, programs such as art and hot lunch, all extracurricular activities, and two attempts to pass override levies each fail?

School staff goes into a temporary slump, feeling unsupported in the work they do.

The community becomes divided into categories of "school supporters" and "non-school supporters;" Anger and accusations become the order of the day.

Then, quickly, students and community members from both sides of the political issue rally to raise the funds needed to maintain those programs they believe have the greatest impact on the community's children. In seven weeks they:

- gather, split and deliver over 200 cords of firewood
- hold a giant community auction;
- wash several hundred cars;
- sponsor a fun race of plastic ducks on a local river;
- hold raffles, raffles, raffles (for Seattle Mariners tickets, raft trips, a lifetime subscription to an Internet service provider)
- sell family portraits...

and a dozen other means of exchanging local goods and services for cash.

And, in the midst of this activity, Communities Creating Connections, Kooskia's and Elk City's Rural Challenge organization, reassesses how we can best serve our impacted communities. We are partners with Upper Clearwater Arts on a grant for a community artists-in-residence effort. We visit with a wide array of school staff and revisit our second year project plans. We see policy issues on the horizon and

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Community Response

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think about being not only a catalyst for learning, but also a catalyst for needed community dialogue as well. And we think about those 200 cords of firewood, wondering if their gathering can bring us some added community warmth in the months ahead.

Communities Creating Connections is a Rural Challenge project focused on expanding learning opportunities in the greater Kooskia and Elk City communities in the areas of natural resources, the arts, and economic sustainability. For more information, contact CCC Board President DeeAnn Smith, HC75 Box 14, Kooskia, Idaho, 83539 or e-mail to cupds@hotmail.com.❖

Rural Challenge Becomes Rural School and Community Trust

As the Rural Challenge prepares to make its final round of grants under the five-year contract with the Annenberg Foundation, the Board of Trustees is working to plan and ensure the organization's future. One major change, which will take effect on October 1, is in the name of the organization. After much thought and deliberation, the Board has decided to change the name to the Rural School and Community Trust. Because the name Annenberg Rural Challenge has been associated so closely with grant-making, which will no longer be a part of our mission, the Board felt that it was critical to establish a new name and a new "look" for the organization as it continues beyond the original Annenberg funding.

The new logo you see below will be used beginning October 1 on all letterhead, official publications, and the website, and the name Rural Challenge will no longer be used. While the name is new, however, the organization's commitment to advancing place-based education in rural communities remains unchanged.❖

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Rural Policy Matters

November 1999 — A Newsletter of Rural School & Community Action — www.ruraledu.org

Ohio Students Tell West Virginia Gathering

Kids Can be Involved in Making Real School Decisions

Kids can learn, they can serve their community, they can hire their teachers, and they can manage their time, if the experience of Federal Hocking School near Athens, Ohio means anything. That is what Principal George Wood and five students reported to participants at Challenge West Virginia's conference, "Our Communities, Our Schools" in October. The conference celebrates Challenge West Virginia's first year of successful work to develop a grassroots base for rural school improvement and positive policy reforms.

The kids from Federal Hocking stole the show. Can you imagine a rural school where students have an equal place at the table when faculty hiring decisions are made, where students work in the community for as much as two hours every day, where interdisciplinary practice is so routine that kids expect their work in math and history to be graded for grammar?

You don't have to imagine it at Federal Hocking, where the official mission is to help kids prepare for flexible career choices, active democratic citizenship, and lifelong learning. But listening to these kids talk about their school and their education made it clear that there is another mission, too. This school makes these kids responsible for their own education. They understand what they are trying to accomplish in school, and they are making real choices about how to get it done.

It could only be possible in a socio-economically blessed school with lots of resources and a big enough enrollment to generate support for these special programs, right? Nope. Federal Hocking serves an area of Appalachian Ohio where income ranks in the bottom 5% of the state, and 30% of the households don't have phones.

The innovations at Federal Hocking have not been popular with everyone in the community. Disgruntled patrons who like more conventional forms of order pressured the school board into terminating Principal Wood's contract a few years ago. But the kids protested with a walkout and over 1200 local people signed a petition asking for his reinstatement. When the legal and political dust settled, Wood was back at the helm and there were some new school board members. Then the kids drafted up a school constitution enumerating and solidifying their role in shaping their education and it was eventually accepted by the school board. Turns out, kids can govern, too.❖

Welcome to Our New Readers in West Virginia

With this issue of *Rural Policy Matters* we've added over 700 West Virginians to our readership. We hope you find *RPM* useful and informative. Please let us know what you think.

Help Start a Clearinghouse on Rural School Finance Issues

The Rural School and Community Trust is asking rural people for help in developing a national information clearinghouse on school finance issues as they affect rural communities. We hope to launch a full-service clearinghouse next year, with both print and electronic services to lay people and professionals grappling with the complicated issues in school finance.

Rural concerns about inequities in state finance systems have led to increasingly prominent litigation in the state courts. According to University of Georgia professor John Dayton, 16 state Supreme Court decisions have discussed inequities toward rural areas, and 11 of these cases have been decided since 1993. In some instances, the rural/urban disparity has been a prominent feature in the litigation.

Court decisions usually must be implemented by legislative action, and rural areas have often fared badly in that arena.

Rural concern over school finance will likely increase as the cost structure of American education continues to place more pressure on small schools, through increasingly specialized curriculum, centralized standards, and unfunded mandates in special and gifted education. Meanwhile, the need for new investment in facilities intensifies and the local property tax base in rural economies fails to keep up with cost growth.

To meet this challenge, rural people need to become more effectively engaged in the policy making process

continued on page 3

Rural Teacher Shortages

NREA panel sees community as factor in recruiting and retaining

Last month in Colorado Springs, a panel of educators from Alaska, Montana, Vermont, West Virginia, South Dakota, Iowa and North Dakota sat down and found, unfortunately, that their states had much in common. The subject was teacher shortages–problems of recruitment and retention in rural areas. The meeting was the annual convention of the National Rural Education Association. Though the panel was particularly diverse (a teacher union representative, a school board member, a state superintendent, an executive director of a rural/small school organization, a director of student placement of a university), there was broad agreement. Small schools in rural communities are frequently unable to compete with larger districts in attracting qualified teachers.

With active audience participation from states such as Nebraska, Arizona, New Mexico, Florida, and Missouri, the group shared specifics of the problem. Unequal salary was definitely identified as the main culprit. Suburban and urban districts often have the ability to attract more candidates, with significantly higher salary offers. In Alaska, even with very high salaries, remoteness and housing shortages contribute to teacher shortages. Many rural states find that 50% or more of their teacher graduates take positions in other states that have higher pay scales. One participant noted that teacher shortages have led many districts into hiring long-term substitutes since there are no state certification requirements for substitutes. Some rural states do not presently have shortages, except in specific subject areas. Special education, science and math are the fields most frequently mentioned as problematic.

Many rural areas and states have begun developing a variety of strategies to combat this problem. Alaska, for example, has instituted a statewide clearinghouse for job openings and for posting candidate resumes. Many states hold job fairs. Mississippi offers loan repayment for students who teach in rural areas. Other places are beginning programs to encourage student-teacher placement in rural schools and linkage with mentorship programs.

With many promising plans to deal with teacher recruitment /retention, the group identified three very difficult and pervasive problems. First, many of the causes of the teacher recruitment/retention issue center on finances. Rural schools often do not have the fiscal resources to be able to compete with suburban and urban districts and offer comparable salaries and benefits. Second, the link between the economic health of rural communities and rural schools needs to be recognized. Solutions, therefore, demand community/economic development as well as educational reform. And lastly, rural citizens need to be active in promoting the assets and attractiveness of both teaching as a profession, and of rural communities as wonderful places to live. As one participant stated, "we have to make it 'cool' to remain in a rural town and make it your home..."❖

Forest Lands Funding to Rural Schools

I hope for stability

In last month's *RPM* issue we had a report from Idaho that noted the declining revenues available to many rural counties with large tracts of National Forest and forested Bureau of Land Management land. A 1908 law requires 25% of the government's timber receipts from this federally owned real estate be returned to the states to help such counties offset the loss of local property taxes. Changing markets and environmental concerns are some of the factors that have resulted in a reduction of timber revenues in recent years, especially in western states. Many affected counties are facing severe school budget cuts as this historically stable funding stream dries up.

As we go to press, Congress is ironing out what looks to be a workable compromise between competing bills favored variously by timber interests, environmentalists, and the impacted schools and communities. As with many such compromises, no one will likely be totally satisfied with the outcome; however, it may work to solve the current crunch for our friends in Idaho and elsewhere.❖

Riley Recognizes Community Role in School Design and Use

Citizen involvement and community learning stressed

On Wednesday, October 5, US Education Secretary Riley held a news conference at the headquarters of the American Institute of Architects to announce an important policy initiative on school facilities. Building on the "Symposium on Schools as Centers of Community" held last year at which participants, including the Rural School and Community Trust, approved the Six Principles of School Design outlined in our September issue, Riley made four key points:

1) Citizens need to be more involved and engaged in planning and designing schools;

2) We need to build smaller schools, rather than "schools the size of shopping malls," and rural schools that have resisted consolidation can serve as models to which all schools should aspire;

3) We need to build new schools that serve the entire community and can be used by the community throughout the year and at all hours; and

4) We need to look at every community as a living classroom and help students find new pathways to learning.❖

Matters of Fact

Turns Out Equity Rates High, Even on Wall Street

It was a bad day for the enemies of equity in school finance when Moody's Investors Service upgraded Vermont's general obligation bond rating to Aa1 from Aa2 in September. Opponents of the state's new school finance system, which gives all districts equal access to the property tax base, had warned it would dampen economic growth and ruin the state's bond rating. Alas, Moody's said the high quality rating reflects the state's "consistent and balanced economic expansion, conservative budget and other financial management policies, and successful restructuring of the state system of financing public education."

Stats available on service-learning and community service

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has released a study entitled "Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools." Findings indicate that there has been an increase in the percentage of public schools incorporating community service and service learning over the past decade. Rural and small schools, however, are less likely than their urban and larger counterparts to have either type of program. The report is available on the web at http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=1999043 or by calling 202.219.1366.

Nebraska voters will have their day in court

A federal lawsuit against the Governor, Attorney General, and Commissioner of Education of the State of Nebraska is proceeding after a US District judge ruled that the plaintiffs had a legitimate complaint. The plaintiffs, six voters residing in Nebraska Class I school districts (elementary only districts), argue that recent state laws have violated their rights under the Equal Protection Clause of the US Constitution to be treated the same as voters in other school districts. The plaintiffs' complaint is based on the fact that current laws prevent them from voting for a school board, thereby eliminating the right to set budgets and levy taxes to fund their schools. The case is set for trial in January 2000.

Consolidation pays in North Dakota (or does it?)

In North Dakota, where school enrollments are declining, legislators have earmarked $4 million from the anticipated state surplus to aid schools experiencing dwindling enrollments. Assuming there is money to be spent, the state will distribute funds based on the average daily enrollment to schools that have lower enrollments during the 1999-2000 school year than they had in 1994-95. Half of the $4 million will be used as "reorganization bonuses" for school districts that consolidate. The bonus will be calculated using a formula based on square mileage and student enrollment. No word on what will happen if there's no money left over to be spent.

Small schools research

"Current Literature on Small Schools" (1999), an overview of research literature on the effectiveness of small schools by Mary Anne Raywid, is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education & Small Schools by calling 800.624.9120 or by visiting their website at www.ael.org/eric.

Clearinghouse

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than they have been. In part, they will need more accurate and timely information about the merits of this issue, the legal and political developments that are shaping it, and the experiences of rural people who are addressing concerns similar to their own.

A national clearinghouse would provide easy access to up-to-date, reliable, information about school finance issues for rural education activists and educators, attorneys, scholars, and journalists. It would also provide an interactive forum for opinions and perspectives from the field, and give rural people access to one another and to technical experts.

Interested? We need to hear from you. Can you use this service? What kind of information or resources would be most helpful? Would you want to contribute information or analysis? Let us know what you think. Send us an email on the subject "Finance Clearinghouse" or contact us by phone, fax, mail, or through the web (see the back page for contact information).❖

Public Policy Principles of the Rural Trust

Conditions We Seek to Achieve Through Public Policy	***Conditions We Seek to Avoid Through Public Policy***
Children are engaged in the course of their academic program in public work that helps them understand the place in which they live and helps to build a stronger and better community in that place. They are prepared to be active, engaged citizens who can live well in any place they choose. They work with adults, both professional teachers and others.	Children sit in classrooms believing that the purpose of education is to improve oneself by escaping the place and community in which one lives.
Teachers are prepared to teach in a rural setting, open to community participation in the classroom, eager to engage their students in public work that builds community.	Teachers are trained to teach to the test, accommodate their classroom to rigid curricula imposed by state officials, resist the inclusion of non-professionals and local factors in the classroom, and are hostile to student work outside the classroom.

Barriers to Place-based Education

Join the discussion

If you haven't already joined in, you still have time to add your input to the online discussion we are hosting on Barriers to Place-based Education. The discussion starts Oct. 25, 1999 and runs through November 12th. You can join us whenever you'd like during those three weeks–electronically or just with a fax, a call, or a letter–and we hope you will return as many times as you can to see what others are saying and to respond to new postings.

We know from our work with projects in 33 states that schools are capable of amazing things. Student investigations of their home area's arts, culture, history, economics, and ecology can bring learning to life for the whole community. But we also know that there are problems that get in the way of innovative projects working beyond the classroom. We hope through this discussion to investigate how and to what extent state and federal regulations might discourage or encumber place-based education.

Participants will work together to identify regulatory impediments; articulate why these constraints make it more difficult for rural schools to pursue place-based initiatives; suggest alternative approaches that would satisfy the legitimate objectives of existing regulations; and develop strategies to pursue reforms.

Please help us seek the participation of people deeply involved in implementing place-based learning approaches in rural public school settings. If you know of people with valuable knowledge in this area who may not have access to the world-wide web or electronic mail, please let us know and we will contact them by phone.

If you are interested in participating in this discussion and would like to receive instructions on how to join in, please send an e-mail message with your name and contact information to barriers@ruraledu.org or give us a call at 540.432.6962.❖

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To Center Schools in Community

Look for Rural Leadership

Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley recently asked the nation to note the leadership of rural communities in resisting the trend toward separation of schools from communities. In doing so, he implicitly challenged rural communities to lead by example in the battle to make schools the centers of community.

Riley spoke on "Schools as Centers of Community" to an audience of architects and educators at the American Institute of Architects in Washington, DC. He called for citizen engagement in designing and planning schools, for building smaller schools where every child can be known, for new schools that serve the entire community as multi-purpose centers, and for schools that take children into communities for real lessons rooted in real places.

This emphasis on schools as the cen-ters of community precisely reflects the mission and program of the Rural School and Community Trust, and we aim to accept the Secretary's challenge.

The issues the Secretary raised are not, of course, uniquely rural issues. People throughout our society are wrestling with the terrible consequences of schools that separate children from community, isolate them in narrow curricular mazes, and alienate them from the responsibilities of citizenship. But while these concerns are now being felt more and more everywhere, they have long been the particular concerns of rural communities. As Secretary Riley noted, rural communities have been resisters of the trend to remove school from community. And they have sometimes been thought of as "backward" because they have opposed consolidation or cherished local control over curriculum.

The Secretary's challenge to build schools as centers of community throughout the nation needs a forceful and positive rural response, one that is committed to small community schools that produce academic excellence, equal educational opportunity, and powerful public engagement. The generous spirit in rural education needs to be marshaled into a national initiative that focuses policy makers' attention on "schools as centers of community."

The Rural School and Community Trust will do its part. In January we will launch a national dialogue on the role of small schools in reducing the achievement gap between children from wealthier and poorer communities. We will release the results of a large data study comparing achievement in about 13,600 schools in four states. The results are stunning: small schools are effective weapons in the battle to bring achievement up in poorer communities.

Second, we will demonstrate a model for citizen engagement in the design and planning of schools as institutions of community, the specific issue around which Secretary Riley framed his challenge in the American Institute of Architects' gathering. The first step will be a national networking conference for rural activists who are energized around the facilities issue.

Third, we will develop a state-by-state report on how state policies affect the capacity of rural communities to support effective small schools. While the small community school is a specific strength of many rural communities, these schools have plenty of problems of their own. This report will be the first to comprehensively grade the states on how they relate to these educational problems of their rural communities.

And fourth, we will seek urban partners in the small community schools movement because the small school, anchored in the center of community, is a potential unifying force for urban and rural communities in education policy.

The time is ripe for this work. The value of schools at the center of communities is becoming central to the school reform debate. This is an issue close to the heart of rural communities and it is one upon which politically critical rural-urban partnerships can be built. The moment and the opportunity beg action. ❖

In Wisconsin, a simple idea with big impact

The Wisconsin Rural Challenge includes schools where rural students sometimes work with small-town chambers of commerce and Main Street economic development programs. When asked how the state might encourage more projects like these, Ricky Rolfsmeyer, coordinator for the WRC replied: "Give them points on their grant applications."

Simply by offering this suggestion, Rolfsmeyer prompted some Department of Public Instruction people in his state to meet with the Department of Commerce people. As a result, the community development grants for Wisconsin's Main Street revitalization programs now award extra points to grant proposals that involve youth in community development work. Communities are encouraged to think about their young people when they consider community development projects. Rolfsmeyer modestly points out that this little bit of inspired policy work took him about ten minutes and took two state employees only one meeting.

It may not all be as simple as this example, but you won't know until you try. If you have a success story to relate, let us know!❖

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A Thing Of Beauty Is A Joy Forever

McClain High, an Ohio landmark

Writing in response to a recent article in *RPM* about the Six Principles of School Design, David King, Director of the HI-Y Leadership Center in St. Georges, West Virginia suggested adding a seventh principle, "beauty." When we spoke recently with David, he suggested we look at McClain High School in Greenfield , Ohio, a farming community of about 5000 and, not coincidentally, his alma mater, as an example of a school that honors this principle. McClain was recently renovated in a process that reflected the Greenfield community's respect for this essential part of their local heritage.

In 1915 McClain High School was completed with the generous support and guidance of local entrepreneur Edward Lee McClain, who made a fortune by designing and marketing a horse-collar pad fastened by an elastic steel hook, and his wife, Lulu, who appreciated art. In 1923 the McClains donated other facilities and the town built a new elementary school complementing the existing buildings. The school was soon recognized as a compelling example of what was possible in school design. When the superintendent of the Chicago Schools visited Greenfield in 1920, he proclaimed the art-filled library of McClain High School, "the most beautiful classroom in America." A 1987 article in *Capitol* magazine noted that the school is "recognized as a splendid and unique public school, as something totally opposite the usual sterile, hulking squares of dreary halls and repetitious classrooms."

According to Triad Architects, the firm working closely with the community to renovate this facility, the original McClain High School "was designed to incorporate beauty in every aspect. Rooftop gardens, 200 pieces of artwork, (some of it commissioned for the school) and an auditorium lit by amber Tiffany lamps, were just a few of the amenities." Triad Architects "believe the campus is a national treasure that exemplifies beauty in public school.…Nestled in a town deep in the cornfields of southern Ohio, it sits as one of the grandest historical landmarks in Ohio."

How does the combination of Georgian architecture, decorative panels and tiles, classical busts, paintings, and replicas of classical art that adorn the halls and rooms throughout the school affect the life of its 654 students and more than 40 teachers? Dan Strain, a graduate of McClain, who has been principal since 1988, notes "it is such an honor to work here.…14 of our teachers are alumni. Their pride for this building is directly transferred to the students." Randy McNutt writing in *Ohio Magazine* stated: "Perhaps the most unusual feature about McClain is the respect for tradition and loyalty that it commands in an era that ignores such things. In fact, the school is so interwoven with twentieth century Greenfield's social and cultural history that it's difficult for people to imagine life without the building."

Tradition and loyalty, respect for each other, and for their school–a way of valuing their place and themselves, as students, teachers, staff, graduates, or members of the community of Greenfield–perhaps that is the legacy of the McClains' appreciation of the affect of beauty in our lives.❖

Share this newsletter

You are free to copy, scan, fax, post, or stand on the corner and scream out quotes from Rural Policy Matters. All we ask is that you give us credit when appropriate and let us know how this information has been useful to you.

Center for School Change Releases Assessment Criteria Guidelines

On November 9, 1999, the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute released a set of guidelines for the assessment of student achievement criteria. The guidelines are the first part of a federally funded project seeking to understand what goes into an effective assessment system and how schools can share their best practices in this area. The project is now looking to analyze closely 20 public schools whose student assessment programs meet these guidelines. For more information, contact Nicole Johnson at njohnson@hhh.umn.edu or call 612.624.7077. ❖

Matters of Fact

Y2K readiness

A survey conducted by the Department of Education finds that rural school districts are more likely than their urban counterparts to be Y2K compliant (31.2% vs. 23.6%) but are less likely to have written Y2K contingency plans (30% vs. 58.1%). The full report can be found at http://www.ed.gov/y2k/reports.html

Rural telecommunications

The latest edition of *Rural Development Perspectives* includes an article by Kathleen McMahon and Priscilla Salant entitled "Strategic Planning for Telecom-munications in Rural Communities." Although the article is not geared speci-fically toward schools, the authors offer suggestions for rural communities seeking to attract telecommunication investment. Visit http://www.econ.ag.gov/briefing/rural/index.asp#rdp143 or call Doug Bowers at (202) 694-5398 for more information.

Rural service learning

In response to the frequently asked question "What resources are available for

rural educators who are interested in service learning?" the Learn and Serve America National Service Learning Clearinghouse has compiled a list of articles and organ-izations. For a copy, call 1-800-808-SERVE.

Maine voters choose neighborhood schools

Maine voters overwhelmingly rejected a plan that would have consolidated elementary schools in South Portland. Despite facing a potential 6.6% tax rate hike, Mainers opted to keep three small neighborhood schools open. The *Portland Press Herald* reports that school officials and Board of Education members are not ready to give up the 13-year-old plan even after the 65% to 35% vote.

Virginia considers alternative teaching license

The Virginia State Board of Education has unanimously approved an alternative teaching licensure proposal that would help military personnel become teachers. Virginia is facing a severe teacher shortage, particularly in the fields of math and science and in hard-to-fill rural and urban locations. The new proposal will go to public comment before a final vote next year.

House passes Forest Lands School Funding Bill

On November 3, 1999, the US House of Representatives, by a vote of 274 – 153, passed the County Schools Funding Revitalization Act of 1999. This bill, H.R. 2389, secures funding for distressed rural communities hard hit by the drop in timber revenues that has resulted from changing markets and regulatory environments affecting federal lands in recent years. A similar Senate bill, S 1608, did not reach the floor before the close of the session. The House bill, favored by timber interests and several education organizations, remains controversial due to its coupling of school budgets with timber revenues.❖

Want to make someone's holidays?

Give a gift that keeps giving. Let us know of other interested rural people who should be receiving *Rural Policy Matters*. Send us names and addresses and we'll let them give us a try.

Barriers to Place-based Education:

On-line discussion first step in hearing your policy concerns

The Rural School and Community Trust recently hosted an open electronic forum to discuss "Barriers to Place-Based Education." The 86 participants—teachers, community members, administrators, researchers, non-profit managers, and academics—brought perspectives from 31 states and beyond. They worked together to begin identifying regulatory barriers, articulating why these constraints make it more difficult for rural schools to pursue place-based initiatives, and suggesting alternatives based on their experiences. You can read the full text of this discussion, toss in your own comments, and keep up with other on-line events by visiting our website at www.ruraledu.org frequently and looking at "What's New."

While each of the diverse communities represented by the group faces its own unique chal-lenges, the participants' discussion focused in on four common barriers: narrowly inter-

continued on page 4

***Rural Policy Matters* is available for free to anyone who asks, but we need to know who's out there. Please use this form to add yourself or colleagues to our mailing list; to tell us if you're moving; or to send a financial contribution to help improve policy and practice in rural education.**

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Barriers

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preted standards, lack of resources, limited planning time, and community and professional resistance to change.

What emerged from this discussion are some universal conditions that can help create an environment where place-based education can be an effective learning process.

- **Grassroots efforts, not new formal policies**: Place-based efforts should grow locally, not as a result of "top-down" policy decrees. As Michael Umphrey of Montana writes: "When you focus people on work that they can do within existing structures, and get them busy doing the work, they invent cultural practices that begin solving problems."
- **Schools as community facilities**: Over time, schools have come to be viewed solely as instructional sites rather than as community facilities. By reintroducing the concept of schools as spaces for community functions, the community is more likely to become involved in their local schools.
- **Teachers as both professionals and community members**: More teachers need to recognize that being a true professional means being sensitive to and connected with local culture, traditions, resources, and issues.
- **Power of stories**: Tell success stories of learning in action to parents, teachers, students; community members, policy-makers, and researchers. Let the work speak for itself.

This discussion has just started the conversation about barriers. If you have specific policy hurdles you see from the perspective of your school or community, please let us know. Write us at barriers@ruraledu.org or give a call to the Rural Trust Policy Program office at 802.728.5899.❖

Riley Speech Available

You can receive the full text of Secretary Riley's speech on "Schools as Centers of Community" by visiting www.ruraledu.org or by giving the Policy Program a call at 802.728.5899.

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. If you'd prefer to receive it online, please let us know. E-mail us at policy.program @ruraledu.org or send us a note with your e-mail address included through our web site's comments form, at www.ruraledu.org. You may also correct your address on the label below and fax this page to us at 802.728.2011.

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